DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 367 387 JC 940 137

AUTHOR	Lessard, Richard
TITLE	Integrating Learner-Driven and Organization-Driven Agendas: A Workplace Study.
INSTITUTION	Alpena Community Coll., Mich.
PUB DATE	93
NOTE	146p.
PUB TYPE	Reports - Descriptive (141) -- Tests/Evaluation Instruments (160)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC06 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*Basic Skills; Community Colleges; Cooperative Programs; Employer Employee Relationship; Employment Problems; Followup Studies; *Inplant Programs; *Labor Education; Program Descriptions; Program Effectiveness; Program Evaluation; Quality of Working Life; *School Business Relationship; Two Year Colleges
IDENTIFIERS	Alpena Community College MI

ABSTRACT

For the past 4 years, Alpena Community College (ACC) in Michigan has been involved in the Workplace Partnership Project (WPP), a federally funded program which brings basic skills classes into the worksite to help upgrade employees' math, reading, writing, problem-solving, and science knowledge. The college works with partner companies to help coordinate the needs of the workers with the needs of the company. The classes typically run for 16 hours and involve about 10 students. Instruction is usually very concentrated, with a pragmatic, process pedagogy. This report describes and assesses ACC's partnership with Acme Coating, a relatively small company with high turnover, widespread job dissatisfaction, and high stress among the employees. The report includes: (1) introductory remarks about the importance of self-determination and learner-centered curricula; (2) an overview of the WPP and its objectives; (3) background information on Acme Coating; (4) an overview of the steps taken to move the WPP from theory to practice; (5) the text of instructor journals kept throughout the project to record what was happening in classes and the progress that was made, instructors' final thoughts about the class, and class evaluations and suggestions for improvement; (6) an evaluation of the WPP; (7) a student evaluation questionnaire and results; (8) a copy of ACC's president's article about the project; (9) conclusions about the project; and (10) follow-up results at Acme Coating. (AC)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED 367 387

INTEGRATING LEARNER-DRIVEN AND ORGANIZATION-DRIVEN AGENDAS: A WORKPLACE STUDY

by Dr. Richard Lessard,
Workplace Communications Director
Alpena Community College
Alpena, Michigan

1993

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

R. Lessard

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☑ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality

● Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

JC 940 137

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introductory Remarks. 1

Project History And Objectives. 4

ACME Coating. 6

Workplace Problem-Solving/Communications From Theory To Practice. 8

Instructors' Journals 11

Evaluating The Project. .111

Student Evaluations 113

Interpretive Data 122

President's Article 125

Letter From The President 127

Conclusions 128

Follow-up Results 130

Follow-up Reactions 138

Works Cited 140

INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

> *Robert Frost once remarked that students can't be taught to think by rapping them on the knuckles and shouting, "Think!" They can, however, be put into situations that require thinking from them. Such situations are for us by our presence in an audience--it is when confronted by the ideas of others that we look for our own.* (Gage, 1986, p. 20)

Students, like all of the human persuasion, need to have a voice in the decisions which affect their lives. "Self-determination is more than a capacity; it is a need" (Deci and Ryan, 1985, p. 38). However, it is traditionally the "experts" from academia who pontificate about what students should be getting, but aren't getting, from their educational experiences. Unfortunately, these people have little concept of the daily truths of working in the actual educational field because far too often they haven't really *participated* in the mainstream of education for years, if ever. They have been sheltered by the world of academic theory, by highly capable and motivated students, and by colleagues who gain their "experience" vicariously through observation of others.

Then there are those leaders of industry who want schools to specifically address those skills needed in their particular work settings, and emancipatory theorists fear them most of all because of the ramifications of such organization-driven agendas. These are two significant stumbling blocks to educational reform--someone else keeps telling others what they need. The agenda is being driven by those outside the vehicle, without a license.

In a way, these same things tend to happen in traditional classroom environments. The instructor, to establish his/her credibility as a well organized expert, appears that first day, syllabus in one hand and texts in the other, and proceeds to let students know what will be covered for the semester. They almost view the students as empty vessels to be filled with the knowledge dispensed in the class. Students aren't asked what they need, what they enrolled in the class to learn. Their majors or minors aren't fully considered, nor are their career goals or their histories. Yet it was their career goal which probably prompted them to go to college. But, ever the conscientious one, the professor reflects on his/her own life, or history, and the changing world in general and dutifully adjusts the syllabus accordingly. However, that professor's world is not the same as the students' worlds; it never has been and it likely will never be.

> *People assume at first that minds match, that other people see the world as they do, think about it the same way, mean the same thing when they use the same words, and fill in the gaps of language as they do.* (Moffett, 1992, p. 19)

If education is going to keep pace in our changing world, it too will have to change. Absolutism and polarization have not served education well in the past, nor will they help it in the future. As educators, we must reflect upon our dynamic world, and listen. But the question becomes, to whom should we listen? The answer might well be, we should listen to everyone--and we should especially listen to our students.

If we are to make our classes meaningful, we must consider our students' worlds, their histories and their futures. We must ask them about their perceived needs and work *with* them to meet those needs. We cannot be expected to be experts in all fields, nor can we assume that our students are the experts. But if collaboration works in the world of work, it can't be a bad idea in the classroom.

This is what the learner-driven curriculum is all about. People tend to be fearful, intimidated in situations where they have no control. In workplace classes, we traditionally have students anywhere from twenty to fifty years old, most of whom have rather unpleasant memories of their previous schooling. The older ones have lost the desire and the energy to compete with the younger ones, especially after a full day's work. When they come to class they may feel uncomfortable, even stupid, and they wonder what the instructor "wants from them." Many have "exaggerated the contrast between [school] and the 'real world' to where it has created a tension...tension about 'safe versus dangerous' and about 'boring versus exciting'" (Bruner, 1990, p. 133). They have little confidence in what they know and even less confidence that what they know will be valued.

Often they are stressed and worried about the present as well as their future. They have experienced the discomfort that comes from not being able to measure up to the demands of their changing workplace--otherwise they wouldn't be there. In teaching these classes, we soon realized that we would have to address these factors; we decided that we would have to take the risks that go along with a student-driven agenda if we were going to offer classes that would be of authentic value to our students. We had to rid ourselves of any notions about "standardized" learning and strive to narrow the gap between the academic world and the world they lived in. Our objective was "merging critical thought with daily life" (Shore and Freire, 1987, p. 3). Making it possible for students to reach their goals was up to us, but they were the ones to establish what those goals were. They taxed our knowledge and our resources every day, but they knew why they were there and we saw our roles as facilitators rather than as experts, or dispensers of knowledge.

The students were first surprised to find that their input would help determine the agenda, then skeptical, then elated. We were pleased with what we learned from them as well. Establishing a curriculum around their perceived needs provided us with a means of validating what they knew, a rare thing for most of them, something few had experienced in their previous learning, and often it took time for them to adjust.

PROJECT HISTORY AND OBJECTIVES

For the past four years, Alpena Community College has been involved in The Workplace Partnership Project [WPP], a federally funded program which brings "basic skills" classes into the worksite to help upgrade employees' math, reading, writing, problem-solving and science knowledge. We work with "partner" companies who help us coordinate the needs of the workers with the needs of the company. The classes typically run for sixteen hours and involve about ten students at a time. The instruction is usually very concentrated and intense, with an understandably pragmatic, process pedagogy. Our hope is to instill some knowledge and background that will provide a basis for continued learning after the classes are completed. We are trying to promote more understanding of the concepts of the changing workplace and lifelong learning.

We concluded early in the project that in the WPP classes students will put to rest any serious questions about whether or not they are capable of assessing their own educational needs. Their pragmatic approach to meeting those needs will also help insure that they will leave the classes better prepared to function on their own.

> *Behavior undertaken when the functional significance is autonomy-supportive has been related to greater interest, more creativity, more cognitive flexibility, better conceptual learning, a more positive emotional tone and more persistent behavior change.* (Deci and Ryan, 1987, p. 1027)

Because they have found themselves in a rapidly changing work environment, they are highly aware of their deficiencies and are anxious and practical about overcoming them. But they also show little interest in dealing with things not directly related to their unique work settings. For example, if they write in the workplace, they know where they struggle and where their problems lie. If they don't write, they will seek out those areas of communication which will benefit them. If all is not right in the workplace, they will work hard to address the things that need to be fixed, once they learn some good problem-solving strategies.

They will come up with highly creative ideas that management may have overlooked. Their motives traditionally have lacked the egocentric selfishness critics have warned about. They have tried to do what is best for the company because ultimately that makes them better, more efficient workers; they will do what is best for their fellow workers because that makes everyone's job easier; and they will work with management for the betterment of all because that makes the company and its employees more secure in a highly competitive world market. These rather bold conclusions were reached after working with a group of production and management students at "Acme Coating."

Our classes at Acme served to debunk the myth that self-directed and company-directed learning are incompatible, or at best, make for a stormy marriage. Many critics see industry-driven agendas as agents of domestication, of sleeping with the oppressor, while they perceive student-directed agendas as the soil for chaos, confusion and anarchy. However, today's global business climate has forced companies to review their management policies and take a serious look at the team management approach as a way to improve both productivity and morale. To that end, our experience has led us to believe that the interests of both the employees and the businesses can be served quite nicely when people work together.

Certainly under the right [or wrong] leadership there is the potential for bad things to happen. But if self-direction means anything, if it is indeed what is practiced in employee development classes, it means that its merits will be judged by those engaged in the activity, which is why the composition of the class is a key component. If possible, classes should enroll a mix of supervision and production workers alike. It also means that students will not be duped by some devious hidden agenda during the course, nor will they be content to relinquish empowerment once the class is over. Thus, self-directed learning poses a threat to any agent trying to use it as an avenue of oppression; those who try to use it to strengthen their power are destined for failure. Wiser administrators know better. They have become aware of the merits of "collaborative exploration of experiences and understanding negotiations among *equals* over meanings and values" (Robinson, 1990, p. 213)

ACME COATING

Acme Coating is an old, relatively small company which coats and treats various metal components for larger industries. Companies bring the raw parts to this plant and pick them up after they are processed. For the most part, men are working with chemicals, zinc and nickel, and trying to control the temperature in the treating tanks for the sensitive process. The company is the largest consumer of fresh water in the community [up to 50,000 gallons a day] and takes great pride in its recently upgraded treatment plant.

Although most of the workers claim they dislike the work there and are looking to move on, there are a few people who have over twenty years of seniority; still, most of the workers have put in less than five years. There is a particularly high rate of turnover at the bottom of the seniority list. Then, for the past four years it has been run by a new manager, the young man who married the owner's daughter. He is fairly progressive and wants to improve conditions, but he must answer to higher powers and isn't in a position to make instant decisions on his own. How he achieved his presidency in the company has hampered his rapport with the men, especially with the older workers, though there is general agreement that he is "a lot better than what we had before."

The plant is not highly automated. They can turn out as many as 40,000 parts in a single day, and most of the work is done manually, pulling parts out of a "gon" by hand and hanging them on the racks, piece by piece. Each piece is individually "inspected," and some workers can stand all day looking for flaws in their products--new workers report that they are put on inspection the first week on the job and often don't know what they are supposed to be looking for.

They start as early as 3:00 am, but more typically 6:00 am, at barely above minimum wage. As one worker put it, "The work is hot, dirty, smelly, boring and dangerous." The lines move fast and some of the men are under steady pressure to keep up. The high turnover rate factors into the stress levels, as experienced workers have little patience with or tolerance for those who fall behind the pace; new workers must pull their weight from the start or they're gone. This plant clearly illustrates that it's a buyer's market in the world of labor.

The stress doesn't end on the production floor. Acme subcontracts for the big auto companies, who have made it clear that everyone has to do more with less. Management has responded; there are fewer workers than there were several years ago and they are expected to do more work than in the past. Certainly management is under constant pressure to accommodate their customers, while at the same time, keeping the company financially stable. The plant manager put it rather succinctly: "When Ford calls, we jump. We have to give them what they want when they want it. We can't say 'no' or they'll find another place." This exacerbates the communication problems. Line set-ups have to be changed to meet "hot" orders, supervisors find the most expedient rather than the most effective ways to communicate, and workers feel that they are at the bottom of a viscous pecking order, unless they can find someone worse off than themselves; it is the new workers who supply the fresh meat at this snarling, cannibalistic banquet.

When we arrived on the scene the plant was suffering from the aftermath of a difficult and painful unionization process. Although in its previous years communication at this facility was hardly exemplary, the unionization struggles tended to force people to take sides; battle lines were drawn and attitudes grew more entrenched as each election approached. The president of the company told us, "The last two elections were real close, the first time, say mid-forty percent one way and mid-fifty percent the other. Then, on the second vote, it went the other way; so no matter which way it turned out, about half of the people were unhappy about the results." Management, of course, opposed the union in open as well as more covert ways; we were never fully told the tactics either side used, but it was clear that these were difficult times for all who worked there. At any rate, we started classes there with some residue that made our task much more difficult.

WORKPLACE PROBLEM-SOLVING/COMMUNICATIONS FROM THEORY TO PRACTICE

We weren't absolutely certain about the best ways to conduct our classes, although we based our decisions on some solid theory. We were also aware of the many dangers in trusting much of the agenda to students. Could they be trusted with their own education? Would they use the opportunity to take the path of least resistance? Would they be aware of what they didn't know and would they honestly be willing to admit to their deficiencies, especially in front of those they see on a daily basis? Would they be willing to help others through rough spots? Would they make self-serving choices that would endanger the productivity and viability of the company? This paper will provide some encouraging answers to the above questions.

We began with a needs/goal assessment. We wanted to address those issues identified by management and labor as most critical and/or relevant. Through discussion with both, we came up with the following list:

President's Goals:
1] create a climate and open some structures for employee initiative
2] allow the workers to identify company-specific problems and develop ways of solving them
3] establish a forum for dialogue between workers and supervision
4] demonstrate management's commitment by supporting the project and providing release time for workers to attend classes

Workers' Goals:
1] break down communication barriers
2] focus on attacking problems rather than people
3] build trust and cooperation between management and production
4] promote better cooperation and understanding between workers

It is clear that they all wanted to deal with each other more productively, so that's where we decided to begin.

WPP Goals in Response:
1] examine the present communication processes and determine ways to improve it
2] model the problem-solving and communication processes by working with company-specific issues and solutions
3] address the express communication needs of these adult learners in the workplace
4] establish some structures which will improve communication and problem-solving strategies once

the classes have concluded
5] follow up on indicators which will help determine if our classes have had an impact on productivity or job satisfaction

Since Mikulecky (1986) found a strong relationship between job performance and higher order metacognitive and problem-solving skills, we felt that we could achieve the objectives of our students and our partner by developing a course in critical thinking and problem-solving while at the same time addressing some of the basic communications problems they seemed to be experiencing there. Mikulecky suggests that metacognitive skills are needed for peak efficiency in the workplace. In particular, then, we tried to develop classes that would help our students to:

- ask questions
- monitor their own comprehension of skills
- focus and anchor key ideas in memory
- use information to plan and problem-solve

(Mikulecky, 1986)

Sticht's findings (1982) demonstrated that student end-of-course retention was much greater if a job-related agenda is followed. "Knowledge is acquired not in the role of a spectator but through use" (Bruner, 1990, p. 70). More specifically, a demonstration of good generic academic skills will not automatically transfer to workplace applications, nor does it imply that students will retain these skills after classes are completed. Sticht concluded that students learn much more, much faster, and retain information longer when they are drawing from experiences within their immediate environment; when using such a pedagogy, motivation and relevance are not issues. Good instruction involves providing enough information and guidance to help develop and channel students' problem-solving and decision-making capacities. It means supporting knowledgeable choices and discouraging emotional ones. Thus, when our students chose to deal with their specific problems in their specific domain, we agreed that they were on the right track.

In job-related programs the mission and goals of our partner organizations are primary concerns since part of the training cost is borne by that organization. However, the development of the individual and the goals of the organization are not necessarily antithetical. Increasingly businesses are adopting a more enlightened perspective on the long term benefits accrued from a workforce of skilled and educated employees working with management to improve production and quality. Typically the need for upgrading employee skills is initiated by technological change, customer requirements, and competition. But in Acme's particular case, neither the supervisors nor the production workers were concerned about upgrading technical skills. The president strongly believed that it was to the company's advantage to have a more cohesive workforce so that the objectives of the company could be carried out more efficiently. The workers, in turn, wanted to feel better about coming to work and about themselves. Still, they also wanted to enjoy some job security that comes from working at a viable company. All of our participants felt their goals were highly compatible.

Instructors' Journals

Throughout the project, instructors kept journals recording what was happening in classes and the progress that was made as projects developed. These provide the clearest picture of what transpired, on a daily basis, with each group. Altogether, there were five different groups of six or seven men who met twice weekly for two hours [one group met twice weekly for one hour]. Group one, the "pilot group," stayed on for a second session in order to complete a project they were working on. This class consisted of those people the president identified as "key" to the improvement of communication in the plant, so he was content to let them work together a little longer. The class consisted of the plant manager, the man heading the quality control team, a highly vocal and volatile crew leader, a lift operator affectionately known as "hog" for his work ethic, the manager of the waste treatment facility, a chemical analyst who is in charge of monitoring the chemical levels in the treatment tanks, and a new "probationary" worker who racks pins before they are put into the tanks. This group represents a good blend of supervision and labor, but it is also possible that these people were selected because there was a history of friction between them. The combination also represented a varied range of seniority in the plant. One student had been there nearly thirty years, another twenty, two around fifteen, and on down to the new worker with three months in. The subsequent groups did not enjoy the same range of work status and experience, but both supervision and labor were represented in all but two of the six classes we held.

At the outset, no one was real sure about the posture the classes would assume, including the instructor. Although he had worked with WPP classes for two years, each class tends to be unique and experience can sometimes serve to work against a teacher. Also, since this class was to be more along the lines of problem-solving rather than writing, it was not possible to establish much agenda before that first class. We knew the students generally felt that they had their fill of the negative atmosphere of the past and wanted to make changes, but they hadn't identified the problems nor had they considered how they could be solved.

The first days of classes in any workplace setting are usually quite difficult. No one is sure how meaningful the classes will be, and as instructors, we aren't sure about the motives or the commitment of management and workers alike. At Acme, the president seemed to want to establish a more team-oriented approach, though we couldn't help but wonder if he was genuinely prepared to relinquish some of his power. And, were the other supervisors willing to give up some of theirs in support of his new approach? Were the workers honestly interested in changing things or were they just content to come to class and relax, get away from the production lines for a while and complain about their powerlessness? Company politics always play a significant role in what happens in our classes, and what happens after they are finished.

What follows is a daily summary of what took place in the classes, along with some of the instructors' reactions. The first journal relates what happened as the pilot group began to shape their class and learn better ways to communicate and solve problems they felt needed to be addressed. Then, this group stayed on for a second and third session of one-hour classes (16 hours) to develop an employee "Job Progress Report" to be used as a means of creating positive communication between supervision and workers.

The other groups created various structures that would improve communication and working relations in the plant. They met twice weekly for four weeks (16 hours). At the completion of each class, the group presented its proposal to the president of the company, explaining and clarifying as was needed. This was a very worthwhile part of the project. They first had to compose a letter outlining their proposals, choosing the language that would create a positive impression. The upcoming sessions with the president served as motivators, forcing them to look at their proposals from a perspective other than their own. They spent a great deal of time trying to anticipate questions and problems the president might bring up in those meetings. As one student put it, "We'd better have our ducks in line before we try to talk to him."

Instructor's Journal
Acme Coating - Students: A, B, C, D, E, F, & G

5/25

I arrived early and got briefed by the president. It's going to be a challenging group, he tells me, because these are key people in this plant and they have a long history of conflict and skepticism about management motivations. He is right, it turns out. I find out early it's going to be a tough group.

These people are under a lot of stress. That strikes me right away. When Lopez came through a couple years ago and told the auto suppliers they were going to have to do a better job with quality in less time for a third less money, he was speaking to companies like Acme. This demand angers the employees here for two reasons: 1) it smacks of finger pointing, as if the auto industry is passing the buck on its failure to compete and shifting the blame to the parts suppliers; 2) it puts more pressure on them to do a better job, exacerbating any communication problems that already exist. The people I have in this class basically run the plant; they are responsible for production, shipping, receiving and scheduling. They have to learn to deal with each other more productively and that's where I'd like to see us begin.

They are wary as I swing into my introductory spiel. B. was brusque. G. looks like he thinks this is going to be a waste of valuable time. A. and D. are management so they see the need, but they're skeptical too, not wanting to side with an obvious loser. F. is the only one who's making eye contact; he's willing to give me the benefit of the doubt but he shoots down my camcorder idea. C. just started with the company six months ago. He keeps his head down and his mouth shut. E. runs the water treatment operation.

They quickly shoot down most of the activities I mention as starting points. They don't write much on the job and the union guys associate writing with "getting written up" for various work violations, so they rebel against any suggestion that writing is a valuable exercise. G. and B. are especially dead-set against writing. G., I suspect, is low skill and doesn't want to expose that to the rest of the group. B. may or may not be low skill; it's hard to tell, but it's clear he has a lot invested in being thorny and difficult to deal with. He makes it clear to me that he thinks this class is going to be a waste of time.

I start with a one-way vs. two-way communication diagram. They agree, with some grumbling, to try it. F. goes first, illustrating one-way communication, then E. volunteers, illustrating two-way communication. They respond with a challenging mix of indifference and skepticism as if to say, "What does all this prove?"

Next I ask them to write how they can improve as communicators and how communication in the plant might be improved. B. gets hung up on writing it down. The rest bend to it with some resistance. As I go around the group, it's hard to get them to focus on how they might improve their communication skills. They want to point fingers instead--at the president for letting the quality circles fade out as well as his not including everyone in these classes. It seems clear that they seem to be saying that there is no use in continuing on, the class is doomed to failure.

It is clear that I'm going to have to rethink everything--that what I did with other workplace classes is going to have to be extensively modified. Welcome to the workplace classroom, Don.

5/27

The class goes better today. Lying in bed last night, trying to think of something other than handouts to get them going, I flash upon something I read in the Free Press about how Lopez and GM are suing each other. Figuring that Lopez would be a figure of some interest to them, I cut the article out and copy it for class.

It goes over very well. I think some of them, A. and D. particularly, were conscious of the fact that by giving them this to read, it showed that I was thinking about how to make the class worthwhile. I'm not sure the others thought it through that far, but it sparked some discussion about their work and the pressures involved, which led neatly into what I wanted them to do for the day--describe what they do and the hardest part of their job.

As they described their work, I asked questions, inviting the others to fill in the details. The result was a fast-paced interactive ninety minutes that loosened their tongues and got their minds working. I could see their skepticism fade by degrees as they talked about the intricacies of what they do.

After class D. came up and talked to me explaining the various loyalties each member of the class held. He said they thought this class was going to be like the other problem-solving classes he'd been in where you'd split up into groups and work on problems, but now he could see that I was taking a different approach. He liked it, he said.

6/1

A. mentioned Dr. Demming during the last session, so I bring in his 14 principles for management. I show this to the group as I set up the laptop computers, figuring on introducing some basic computer skills as we work through a discussion on Demming's slant. It works well.

By way of introduction, I lead them through the ROAD tutorial, which they like a lot. It's a basic skills introduction to the computer, highlighting some keyboarding and basic computer functions. They really like dealing with the computer, especially C. B. and E. G. seems spooked by the machine and is visibly afraid of pushing the wrong button and making a mistake. A. and D. proceed methodically, following directions without making mistakes. E. and B. forge ahead, make mistakes, and start over with mo remorse. F. and C. take the middle road. It's fascinating to see the different ways they adapt to this new learning. I think next time I'll bring a consultant to give them a brief lecture on computers, then move into the problem-solving part of the class. I want to keep things going now that they're fully engaged.

6/3

A defining moment for this class. I printed out their comments on Demming they put into the laptops, them put together a page of feedback, emphasizing the positive but asking some hard questions too. As I handed the papers back to them, I think it was more than they had expected, or maybe just a different slant. At any rate, they read with greedy interest. The room was dead silent for at least ten minutes and I began to wonder if I'd seriously erred by making their comments open and available to the rest of the group. When they finished reading what the others had written, they turned to what I had to say, giving it the same scrutiny. More silence. I wondered if I had challenged them too hard.

But A. turned to a comment I'd made about what he'd written, a phrase about breaking down barriers. In my feedback I wrote, "I absolutely agree. But how is this done?" They took the issue and ran with it. For the next hour they came up with thoughts and ideas relating to this central theme. Several times emotions threatened to get out of hand, but they held it together after I broke in and told them that, because they kept interrupting each other, nobody was listening and listening is a key component of communication. They then went back to the point with some conscious consideration for hearing the other guy out.

Some expected politics emerged, and there was some defensive positioning between supervision and labor. But in the long run, meaningful dialogue was taking place--each side was beginning to be heard by the other.

We went into the left-brain/right-brain stuff to cool off the group discussion and they seemed to find it interesting. We talked about my role in the project and I tried to level with them, saying that my motives were selfish too. I wanted to get something going here that would satisfy the business as well as satisfy the grant people in Washington. They were all eyes as I explained this.

I think the group has really taken off. We have four more sessions and I want to see how far we can go.

6/8

The class took a giant step forward today. The assignment from last time--what makes a good listener--seemed to finally liberate them. They all put down some strong stuff, which I then printed out on the computer and distributed through the class. In the serendipitous way things sometimes converge, the writing assignment led nicely into the ongoing list of problems the class has been generating. Listening seems to be a concept they are eager to embrace because I noticed for the first time how tender they've become about not jumping each other. A. and D. were the first to see what I was trying to do in bringing the class together, but now the others see it as well, and everyone seems into the notion that we are pioneers here and there's a real opportunity to make some change for the better.

The last thing we did was an assignment on how to come to consensus. They bought into it, B. especially. His transformation has been startling. Though the most skeptical student often makes the most progress, I was far from sure in my own mind that B. wasn't going to sabotage the class for himself and the rest, which he has the capability of doing because he has such a strong, opinionated personality and an aggressive presence. I'm not sure what the turning point was for him; I think it might've been when I brought in the computers. The machines piqued his interest and allowed me to deal with interaction without it being perceived by him as touchy-feely stuff. B. is a bright guy with a suspicious mind.

I'm really beginning to enjoy this class; I sympathize with the men's problems. They do a hard, boring job for very little money. Still, they have a lot of pride in their work. They want to do a good job. I think we're working through some of the issues (which A. called barriers) that have made their work lives pretty miserable.

6/10

Again a giant stride forward. The group seems aware that time is running short and now that they're gathered and enjoying themselves, they are already nostalgic about some of the things we've done. The most remarkable thing about today's class came near the end. With about twenty minutes left, B. lit out on the question of write-ups. A. answered him and the rest of the group began filling in. For ten or fifteen minutes, it was like I wasn't even there. They were able to do what they need to do, which is talk to each other and listen, without needing me to mediate and referee their differences. It was a dramatic example of the power and pertinence of a problem-solving approach with adults in the workplace. Then, suddenly B. turned to me and asked, "Well, what do you think? How bad are we?" I told them that they were doing just fine, and that there were no shortcuts to talking things out and focusing on specific problems.

I had them write a journal entry telling me how the class was going. I wanted to get some feedback so I could adjust if I had to before it was too late. It was generally positive, suggesting we keep going with what we were doing. After they finished, I began working with them on a letter to the president, describing what we had done in class. They honed in on the wording. "Does it say what you want it to say?"

On the last part, dealing with the write-ups, they did some especially good editing. Watching them work, it struck me once again how adults in the workplace, even if they are low-skilled in all the traditional measurable ways, are generally very astute editors when the material pertains to them--or better yet, has been generated by them. It was a pleasure to watch them work.

6/15

Rich attends today. He will be facilitating the next groups. His approach is highly learner-centered, functional in context and outcomes-based. He tries to involve students and motivate them to take responsibility for their own learning. We both thought it would be good for him to see the class at work and become familiar with Acme before he started.

Today's lesson is finishing the cover letter to the president, which is a problem-solving exercise, though I don't think they are conscious of it in that way. But first I have them take ten minutes or so and describe to Rich how he should approach teaching the next class. They emphasize a "hands on" approach and dismiss theory and lecture formats. He listens and enjoys what he hears.

It's remarkable how far they've come in their willingness to say what's on their minds; we've only been meeting for three weeks. D., oddly enough, seems to be fading while B. and A. and G are buying in. C., E. and F. are watchful, as usual, attentive but as yet largely unwilling to venture a viewpoint without being called upon.

B's personality is on full display today, both the leadership qualities and his tendency to lead the group astray. F. added some strong stuff during the writing exercise. For the first time he seemed completely at ease and focused on a problem. A. was conscious of tone. G. sat with his back toward me and his head down as I worked at the flip chart. E. emphasized the working together component. C. came up with some nice transition between the last two paragraphs. It was a highly collaborative letter.

On all our minds now is where we go from here. Do these classes die right here or will the other people get to go through them too. They all seem to agree that everyone needs to go through. I wonder how much of that feeling is based on their assessment of plant problems or a positive, personal recommendation for what they got out of class.

6/17
Last class. The president comes in to discuss the list the class generated on quality improvement suggestions. This is a potentially volatile arrangement because he could easily interpret these suggestions as personal attacks on his management style. That's why A. was paying such close attention to tone; he didn't want to offend the boss.

The president was trying hard to relate to these men, most of whom do not share his background or education, and he was trying to convince them that this list was a step in the right direction. I think the men were skeptical at first. No one wanted to be the first to say anything, so I tried to get the ball rolling by saying that both management and the men in this class needed to be commended, management for allowing us to have the class and the men for putting as much into it as they had. Then B. showed a side I hadn't seen before. He assumed a positive leadership role, asking in his fearless fashion whether there were any items on the list that needed to be explained, anything the president disagreed with. His questions were put on hold. Instead, the president asked, "Should we keep going with this? Are we getting anywhere?" They said yes, let's keep it going, we're just starting to get somewhere. Then B. said, "How about us now? Are we going to have to sit here on idle while everyone else goes through? That's no good. We want to keep this thing going." Then he went on to suggest, "Let's go an hour or so. Have Rich help us along until we can go it alone; y'know, give us some direction and then bleed us off'n it." He agreed to more classes.

Final reflections:

I see two things here. One, we have an opportunity, if we continue to deliver a good product and management follows through with the plan to run everyone through problem-solving and decision-making, to devise a productivity model that might help validate our existence. Two, I see the utter lack of validity of the TABE to what we're doing in class. It doesn't come close to measuring what these men wanted to cover, or what they needed.

In some ways, this was the hardest and most satisfying class I've taught in the workplace. Some of the men made considerable gains, especially B., G, and A. I think F. made progress, while C. and E. valued their exposure to the computers. D. was in and out, into it some days and flat on others. He approached me after the seventh class and said he thought the class was going to be more structured problem-solving than it was; A. standing right next to him said he thought they were getting just what they needed. They both thanked me for the effort. That means a lot to me.

Evaluation Piece:

I had four main objectives for this class:

1] to get the group talking and listening to each other
2] to help them see the value of working together
3] to get each class member comfortable with expressing his viewpoint
4] to get each person to see himself as others see him

Based on student feedback, I think I was most successful at 1 and 3. Number 2 continues to be a problem because everyone in class sees the difficulty in transferring what we do in class to real life outside this door. This is a problem in every worksite, especially those places that have the most acute communication disorders. In such environments, the workers tend to be more preoccupied with their work environments; they have a harder time seeing how the class might be structured toward their own personal learning goals and so they generally want to loop it back to work. The question becomes: How do we keep this going?

By the conclusion of the class, I think we had instituted a process for this group to work through authentic problems together, focusing on the issue at hand rather than pointing fingers. They did become conscious of audience, delivery and message.

Goal 4 was less successful because there still is a great deal of wariness among the workers. B. personifies this distrust more than any of the rest. Very perceptive when he wants to be, he told the group once that he doesn't trust anybody around here, and they shouldn't trust him either. To him, that's just the way things are and they'll never change.

The best evaluative indicator to come **from** this class was the desire from both the students and the president to keep going and to eventually run everyone through this course. On the last day, we set up the first group as a trainer for the rest to follow. It is a tenuous hold at best and will require constant monitoring and nurturing.

Problem-solving presents special challenges because more than any other content area grouped under basic skills, it draws into authentic workplace scenarios. Even after devising a process approach, the workers eventually want to confront problems they face on the job every day, and generally speakinq, they see the solutions to these problems as beyond their control.

I used an informal survey at the end of class and this gave me feedback as did some of the journal entries they made on the laptops. [see enclosures]

June 17, 1993

Dear

We would like to thank you for the opportunity to participate in Communications 080. We feel that the class has helped us with communication. Being able to freely express ourselves amongst our co-workers has helped us understand the problems we really have. We hope that it will help us all solve future problems.

The first day, we did a demo that was an eye-opener. It showed us how good of listeners we were or weren't, and how well we conveyed our message to someone else. As we continued, through the use of computers we learned how to work together. By the end of class, we all agreed that communication is the key to solving problems and removing barriers.

We came up with a list of ideas we would like you to consider. We feel that working together on these ideas will help improve production and quality. Thanks again for the opportunity to participate in this class.

Sincerely,

The Communications 080 class:

6/8/92
Communications 080
Suggestions for Quality Improvement

(1) Take fifteen minutes in the morning and talk. It would solve a lot of problems. We need to get back to the quality circles.

(2) We need to break down barriers between departments. One way this could be done is by forming cross-functional teams with one person from every department that met once a week or so.

(3) We need to be more conscious of the message we're sending. Separate parking spots and shirts for managers creates a status barrier.

(4) We need to spend more time on training. Pair new guys with experienced workers whenever possible. There needs to be some incentive for experienced workers to train new guys.

(5) Production leaders need to be consulted on quotes.

(6) New guys are afraid to ask questions.

(7) Trainees shouldn't be put on the line the same day they start.

(8) Allow workers to police themselves more. Workers know better than anybody who's not pulling their share of the load and can apply peer pressure on slow workers.

(9) Why run the machines so fast when they are only half-loaded?

(10) The trust factor is missing. Workers perceive management as not following through. Both workers and management need to take time to listen to each other. It's just gotta be done.

(11) The write-up forms shouldn't be used as punishment. The paper does the wrong thing. It creates barriers.

(12) Report forms on machines look too much like write-up forms. Maintenance can feel they've been written up by someone when really all that's happened is that a worker is reporting a machine failure. There needs to be a separate form, color-coded perhaps.

(13) Too many write-ups. "We need to sit down and talk about it before the paper." Discuss the problem first to determine if you need the paper.

(14) Safety should come first. Hazard movies are good, but safetymen should demonstrate what the hazardous materials can do in a production setting and where they are located.

JOURNAL

Problem Solving Class -- 6/23 to 7/16, 1993

Students A, B, C, D, E, F, and G

This is a continuation of the group which worked on communication skills with Don for the first four weeks. They continue to meet (at their request) for one hour, twice per week to try to address some the problems which were discussed in the first session but left unfinished. My goal is to help them develop some habits that will sustain good communication once the class is completed. That will mean that they must find their voices and learn to collaborate in positive ways. I will try to act more in the role of a facilitator than a dispenser of knowledge.

The first day the group was very open and seemed to take up where they left off. I introduced them to the "scientific method" of problem solving to help them see that they need some kind of organized plan when attacking a problem. They wanted get started with the specific problems in their workplace rather than studying theory or model problems. We brainstormed a list of problems and they chose to address "lack of trust" in the plant as their first project. G. suggested that many of the problems we had been discussing actually begin with the lack of trust, and if we could enhance the workers' faith in one another, at all levels, other things would fall into place. My question was, "Who does not trust whom?" and they had to do some thinking about that. B's first reaction was that nobody trusts anybody, but as they discussed it, they began to recognize that the workers trust each other more than management trusts workers and vice-versa.

When it came to the problem-solving concept of "stating the specific problem clearly," the men began to struggle. For one thing, they had trouble defining their terms. When I asked questions about what was meant by trust, or trust about what things, etc. it clouded their rather simplistic picture of what they wanted to do. They began to realize that it wasn't going to be possible to attack all problems with trust at once. We closed the class with the "assignment" of thinking about what we should concentrate on in the next session. For the next class, I prepared a sheet of the points they had brainstormed and the highlights of their preliminary thinking for hand-outs.

It is clear that an hour is not long enough to work with a task-oriented group like this. It takes some time to get focused and once we get concentrating on an issue, time seems to run out before we can accomplish any closure.

6/25
We are still struggling with the specifics of constructing the problem statement. They are not sure how to attack the problem because they aren't sure just what problem they want to address--"trust" is just too vague to deal with. Though they want to concentrate on the issue of trust, they need to begin tracking down some of the roots of the mistrust. We began exploring the subject in some detail, and I asked them if the trust thing was the symptom or the illness; in other words, would it be easier to deal with the things that are causing the mistrust than to try to change the feeling from the start? They began to focus on the constant flow of negative feedback between the supervisors and the workers, which gave us something more concrete. They began to identify some of the specifics of the negative feedback, and the supervisors generally agreed that most of it is unnecessary and counterproductive. As B. put it, "Everything we hear is negative. If we do a good job we never hear about that, but every little thing that we do wrong is written up and put in a file and used against us later." This seems to have poisoned some of the relationships between supervisors and workers. They hate to see a supervisor approach them because they are wondering what they have done wrong this time. It became clear that too much resentment over the past is hindering relationships in the present. I emphasized that if we hope to solve problems, we must deal with the here and now; we can't go back and change history or undo wrongs of the past. We need to let go of that and deal with the things we can deal with now. They pondered that for a while, then I reminded them how easy it is to say these things, but how difficult it is to put them into practice.

I'm trying to get them to deal with the problems one by one and stay focused. They must begin to understand that to solve some of the more general conflicts and hard feelings, we'll have to identify and concentrate on the specific things that are at the root of the attitude. I am also working to get them to separate people from problems, to take a less personal approach. Occasionally one of them slips and launches a more personal attack on someone, but for the most part, they recognize it when I point it out, catch it themselves or another will point it out. They must begin to attack problems rather than people. Their first impulse is to blame right now, maintaining the negative behaviors of the past, and they have to begin to think in more productive terms. It seems as if everyone is trying to protect himself at this point, and they have learned that the best defense is a good offense. As soon as someone approaches them with a problem, they expect to be blamed, which makes them want to defend and protect themselves and their position, so they tend to want to counterattack or try to pass the blame to another person.

6/30
A. wasn't here today. There is a shortage of help. Some are on vacation but there seems to be an attendance problem here. On the up side, the others seemed to spread out the conversation more. As plant manager, A. has enjoyed considerable power at Acme, and some of the men in class tend to drop that power back in his lap. C. talked more than he has in past sessions. The main thrust today focused on the low morale resulting from the negative feedback. They began to come up with some ways to provide more positive feedback for the workers. The main contention is that the negative feedback keeps going into the files. They'd like positive documents in the file as well, and some incentives for doing a good job or improving conditions in the workplace. Some of their ideas would be considered contract issues that we can't really deal with in a class like this, but it was good to see them taking a serious look at the things that could be done. Some would be quite easy and inexpensive to implement. They finally came up with the idea of a "job review" that would include questions which would show that the worker did some good things on a regular basis. Then I asked them to consider A] what, specifically, do they want in it? B] who would be involved? C] how will it be done? D] how often should these things be done? E] what would be done with them afterward? F] how can they keep them from turning into more negative feedback?

I have to keep them from falling into all-or-nothing thinking. They have some very good ideas but they need to think them trough to the point of implementation. They also need to be aware of their definitions of success. They need to realize that things will not change overnight nor will everyone think the things they are doing will work. We talked about their trust thing again and I asked them how to get it; after considerable discussion, they concluded it must be earned, a big concession for B. especially.

7/2
Not a productive day from a problem-solving perspective. From a cathartic point of view, it was good that we had the class. There were only three people here; A. and D. were covering for vacations, F. was not at work, and C. was not permitted to come to class because he had exceeded his allowable number of employee "incidents," which meant he was up for termination. The latter really had the others down. It spoke as a metaphor for the very thing they have been talking about in the earlier sessions. They said he was a good worker but was having car problems and was late "a few times." He was also driving a long distance to work with an unreliable car because he had been out of work for a long time before this job; they wanted some of these things considered. As B. put it, "Here's a guy who needs a break and he isn't getting it." They also said his work record should have been considered and if there were anything

positive in his file, A. could back him up much better. I didn't have a good solution for them, but I suggested that, since they had just gone through a class in communication, they get together and approach A. with some honest input on the matter and see if they were ready to put into practice some of the things they had learned in the first class. I suggested they say many of the same things to him that they had said to me, giving him the rationale they had just mentioned. I cautioned that it might not get the results they wanted this time, but that it was an opportunity to see where they were, and that like the coach, they may be arguing for the next call. In the discussion they also mentioned that A. didn't always get much support from other supervisors and that he might not be in a good position to do much for C. [I liked this, their ability to see the issue from more than one perspective.] I reminded them that they were beginning to look at things from various perspectives--there are likely things we don't know about C's case, that we may not know all of the history.

It is primarily up to them now. I don't feel it is WPP's place to arbitrate on matters such as these. At first, they seemed to want *me* to "do" something for C. and for them, and I don't see that as our role, although I do see that *they* need to communicate, provide their honest input, and get all of the facts. They have tended to fuss, stew and blame rather than communicate; now it's time for them to take on some responsibility for improving things at Acme.

Maybe we could have used a more process oriented approach to the C. issue and gained some insight into how the theories of problem-solving could be applied to such specific problems, but right or wrong, I didn't feel comfortable with such a "cold," academic approach to an issue that meant so much to these men. It seemed at the time that they needed a listener as much as anything. They also vented some of the real feelings they have about the way things are done here and that was good for them. Still, this is a definite set-back for the progress of this group. The anger and the betrayal they feel [it was one of *their* classmates] will not go away soon.

7/7
C. was fired on Friday. The others knew it and were very discouraged over that decision. A. and D. were back today. I can't help but wonder if their absence had more to do with the termination of C. than other factors. G. and B. approached A. about C., and A's position was that it was "spelled out in the contract." B. pointed out [much more tactfully that he has put things in the past] that it states that he was "subject to review," which is much different. A. acknowledged that but indicated he felt his hands were tied, and that C. had been sufficiently warned before he was let go. It really wasn't an angry exchange at all. Both

were more careful with their language as they discussed this, keeping their composure and choosing words which indicated that they were concerned about their audience as well as their message. They also seemed to be honest in their exchange. As for a meeting of the minds, that didn't happen. But maybe something far more important took place here--in the end they sort of agreed to disagree, which could be a healthy sign. I brought the conversation back to the files and asked if there was anything positive in the file to justify supporting C. A. agreed that there wasn't and that he would have loved to have something there to help him and C. out; "I don't enjoy that part of my job at all."

The session became very productive. They began to brainstorm the job review as an answer to some of the problems they were encountering. It was clear they needed more time to think about the logistics of it all, however. We were very short on time today. I asked them to think on this for the next sessions.

We need to emphasize the process more so they can do more without me. I mentioned that the sessions don't have to end next week. A. suggested we continue with this group and turn it into a "quality circle," which they used to have here, but for some reason they were allowed to fade away. On that note, they mentioned that this plant has had a lot of good ideas which have gradually died out through procrastination or lack of interest. This is something we will have to watch for no matter what we try to implement here. Perhaps that accounts for some of the pessimism when we talk about making changes. I mentioned that it may be up to people like them to see that the things we work on are carried out, even if it proves to be difficult at times. A. mentioned that the classes are more effective in that light, because there are times when he would have found it easy to just forget coming, but the fact that it is a class helped motivate him. I gave them some positive support regarding what they had accomplished so far in this one and how much better they were able to communicate as a result of the first one. Still, these men seem to lack the drive and discipline to maintain things on their own. Their tendency is to give up and place blame on others.

I didn't feel it was right to specifically ask if anyone in the group approached A. about the C. situation, but A. mentioned that "some guys approached him," so I'm confident that the B. and possibly one or two of the others talked to him. It is a good sign. If they are going to communicate after we leave, they'll have to communicate outside the class now. I think more of that is going on.

7/9
E. is on vacation. B. still seems upset about C., and was much quieter than usual. I feel he has lost some optimism about what we are trying to do in these classes. He said he'd "like to see a place where you looked forward to coming to work every day. A place where the workers were happy and got along." Idealistic as it sounds, his plea is for a place where things are much more positive than negative, which he feels is now the case. He went on to say that he doesn't expect ever to see it here but I told him that statement probably wasn't true or he wouldn't still be here trying to turn things around, nor would he have made such a statement in the first place. He has some hope or he wouldn't have mentioned it--or even thought of it.

A. reemphasized that it is a good idea to have more positive ammunition in the file. B. asked what would happen if guys should come back and wonder about why some men are starting to get breaks now while others didn't get them in the past. A. said, "The past is over. We have to deal with what's best for the present and future." This is a very big step. A. at least, is showing some inclination to let the past go and move ahead. That is a good sign, especially coming from a man in his position of plant supervisor. He could be a real key in turning things around at the top. For the most part, the men already trust the president of the company and like his style of management. If the other supervisors can begin to accept the input of the workers without fear of being second-guessed and blamed for problems, we could realize some real progress here.

We reviewed two previous Acme evaluation forms which were used for new employees and supervisors. We took some ideas from them but will still have to come up with new and more specific criteria as well as a more positive tone to the questions. The men emphasized keeping the questions and the whole review process positive.

We went through "*sources and questions*" about barriers to communication. A. and D. seemed very interested in both. It is clear that supervision sees the lack of trust and communication as a serious problem too, and they think their jobs will be easier and more pleasant if we can accomplish some things here. They also didn't want a negative connotation associated with the forms, so they decided to label them "progress reports." I'm glad they are choosing their language more carefully. At first they just spewed out the first thoughts that came to mind, usually seeing conversation as combat. Now they are gaining a better sense of their goals and of how audiences interpret their words.

MacMaster
Administrative Observation
of Dr. Lessard 7/12/93

Dr. Lessard has two classes going. He has a one-hour class with the pilot group, the class I had, and he has a two-hour block afterward with a new group. Not counting today's class he has spent six hours with the pilot group and twelve hours with the new group.

The pilot group is working on developing an employee progress report comprised of four elements: a self-evaluation, a peer evaluation, a supervisors' evaluation, and an evaluation of supervision by the worker. A factor for these forms has been the termination of C. and his demise troubled the men deeply. B. is actively seeking a new job somewhere else; E. is as well, though more discreetly. Rich said that G. was very much discouraged by this issue, saying that here was a guy who needed a break, he lived thirty miles away, he'd been out of work for quite awhile and his car was unreliable, and the company didn't see fit to give him the break he needed.

The onus of the group's anger has fallen on A., who could have backed C. but apparently did not. A's position was that the dismissal code is laid out in black and white (in the union contract) so his hands are tied, the implication being that if he lets C. slide then a precedent will have been set and all the workers will turn unreliable.

(Rich makes a good point in the car later, saying that too many companies treat their workers like "employees" rather than people. The effect of this is that the employees become less interested, more resentful, morale goes down, problems go up and production plummets. At that point, many companies turn to hiring expensive consultants to come in and tell them what the workers have been saying all along. Nowhere do workers get feedback from management that they are being consulted or heard.)

The C. issue is a bad situation. But the project is good, although the one-hour format is not sufficient. As Rich pointed out, it takes them several minutes to get focused on the problem at hand; by the time they do, there is too little time to concentrate and process what is going on in the class.

A key issue today is how much longer the class is going to run. Does it end Friday or can we keep going? Listening to them working through the implications of this decision, it strikes me again how hard it is going to be to sustain this approach here after we leave. The temptation of the part of supervision is always to plunge in and be too optimistic about how much can be accomplished in the time available;

the workers, on the other hand, have a much more realistic sense for the complexity of the project and time and energy it will take to breathe life into it. They are not willing to plunge in unless they know they have more time coming. Part of the reason I am here today is to lobby for more time. At this point, I don't think they have a clear sense for the problem-solving process, nor are they close to finishing their product. Six hours won't do it; they need more time.

7/14
Before class, F. came in alone and stated that one of the biggest stumbling blocks in the plant is with one major person in a position of power. He eventually disclosed the name but it is not clear at this point if the things he mentioned are a result of a personal conflict with the man, or if they honestly are a general concern in the plant. F. tends to enjoy playing the role of the victim and he isn't an easy man to read.

Don rode down with me to visit the class, and we talked about the need for going on with the progress report project and trying to convince the president to sponsor another four weeks. They want to see it through. We scheduled a meeting for that purpose.

We reviewed what took place last two sessions but spent most of the time in an informal discussion of what we were trying to accomplish here and how we could sell the president on more time to finish what we have started. The firing of the classmate came up, again perhaps as a plea for sympathy for their plight or maybe they felt Don would do more than I had.

I gave them a review sheet of the problem-solving process, just in case we don't meet again. It was disappointing that we didn't have a good chance to process what we had done in class and how to go on from here, but we ended up with half the time usually spent in such a class [considering the one-hour sessions]. It would be a shame to leave this group at this stage. There is too much left undone and I'm not sure they have been able to see the actual applications of the theory as we tried to put it into practice.

We discussed the implementation of the progress reports. They felt it should be voluntary at first. They also saw that the first few might be much like the first sessions of our classes [hostility-venting sessions] but felt that things would be productive as people began to see what they were all about. A. again tried to defend the C. issue, but E. called him on the "subject to" clause of the contract again. It is clear they want a more personal and supportive approach to management. [See Don's attached observation.]

7/16
The president has agreed to go on with the class. He feels that the progress reports are important enough to see them through. He also mentioned that he would like to send all employees through the classes. That is great news in more ways than one. It sends everyone the message that he is behind what the guys are doing and will do some things to make them work. It also indicates that he is seeing some positive results from this project and that he is willing to commit more time and money to it. Let's hope that it really

equates to more production and better quality and a more positive working environment.

I'm quite sure we have had a positive effect on the atmosphere here, in several ways. Perhaps we have stopped the downward slide at least. If we can now level things off and begin to turn them around as we run the other classes through, we can see just how much our programs can impact this workplace. Communication and morale were, at best, poor here when we began. Both management and labor were aware of this and now show a willingness to work together to improve it.

The men were pleased to learn that we could go on. We got started on the actual documents, beginning with the self-assessment. They have generated 10 questions so far and will narrow them down to keep the forms as simple as possible; they also want to limit the document to one page per section. B. and D. still wanted to do some evaluating of ideas during the brainstorming phase of the process, but backed off right away when I and the others reminded them that evaluation only comes later. G. is still on vacation but the group worked well today, everyone contributing. They have trouble staying focused on the specific subject at hand, wanting to solve all problems as we go along. This is quite natural at first but we must remind them that problem-solving needs focus and needs to come one step at a time. They are fairly good at the initial stage of generating ideas, but they tend to rush things during the evaluation phase and want to move on before they fully consider the impact of their ideas. I keep asking them to use questions on their form that will meet their goals.

A. was throwing a lot of ideas on the table today, perhaps because he is going on vacation next week and wants to provide his input before he goes. It is a good sign; he is showing he cares about the project and is thinking about it outside the class time. E. was too quiet. He has mentioned that he is working on another job and hopes he won't be here much longer. That does little to enhance his commitment to the project, nor does it inspire the others.

A. saw a rating system [1 through 5] as a possible way to go, so I gave a mini lesson on the pros and cons of such a rating, particularly on the "halo effect" and how different raters have different standards, trying to show them the dangers of such a form when using a variety of raters. After a brief discussion, they decided that open-ended questions would be better. Now I fear I may have talked them out of that format and maybe I shouldn't have. A. also suggested a check list of various qualities needed in the workplace, but B. mentioned that it would force people give questions more thought if raters had to come up with their own ideas on the co-workers' attributes; the others quickly saw the advantage of that. I thought that was excellent input.

They are working on questions that will be very positive--almost a no-lose situation, something the person can come out of the conference feeling good about. Still, they all agree that they don't want to work beside slackers and emphasized that these reviews shouldn't be handing out false compliments, nor should they be seen as a means of protecting poor workers. Short but productive session.

7/22
We are very pleased with the president's support and commitment to this project. He has supported us and his workers throughout our work here. The men are beginning to sense his commitment to the goals of the project and to the things they have worked on in their classes. He has related to me that he likes to see his employees interacting with each other and, he likes to see "laughing and joking between people who hardly talked to each other before." He added that after the friction caused by the recent unionization, "I didn't know if we were going to make it here for a while." He seems to want to develop a positive environment in the workplace, but some of the other supervisors seem to be from the "old school" and subscribe to the top-down management style. They may even perceive employee empowerment as a dangerous thing, believing in "keeping the men in line." But the concerns of the men indicate that they care about the success of the company as well as their own comfort [or discomfort, as the case may be]. They aren't asking for unreasonable or selfish things.

F. came in early so I approached him about his comments in our earlier conversation. He expressed little optimism that there would be any genuine change in the person in question. F. felt that, "Although he knows all the right things to say, he can't seem to put them into practice. He just goes back to the old ways. The guys all see this in him; he's two-faced." Whether these things are true may not be the issue; the fact that the men feel this way is what counts. If, for example, he is going to stay with his top-down approach, the men will realize few gains from their job "progress reports." If they feel that their reviews will not be valued, they will see little reason to use them, or be honest with them if they are used. When the others came in we continued to revise the progress reports. B. was very hyperactive and "adolescent" today, trying to crack jokes, hindering progress more than helping it. The others forged ahead, giving him negative feedback which he failed to pick up. Eventually B. and D. got into a hostile exchange over the validity of a particular question, and I had to remind them that we should discuss the question, not the people who would be involved in it. They took that lead, but clearly there is some genuine hostility between these two students.

7/27
G. was at work but did not come to class. He was on vacation for over a week and he thinks he, "found things in such a mess back there that I can't leave before it gets straightened out." He is highly respected for his work ethic [aka "hog"] and takes great pride in this reputation. I'm not sure he is as confident of his abilities to impact the workplace with his contributions to the class. F. and A. did the bulk of the work on the revisions. B. was quiet and so was D. Perhaps they hadn't gotten past some of the hostility in the previous class. We spent time revising the self and the co-worker review forms and began to work with the questions for the supervisors' section. I didn't feel much energy or enthusiasm today--is it because of something I don't know about? Has this group been together too long? Has the firing of the classmate undermined their efforts?

A. still wants to use a check-off system; the others remain firm on the open-ended questions. They are also showing a strong awareness of the language of the questions. I keep reminding them of their ultimate goal, which is to make this a vehicle of positive feedback for the workers.

A. expressed a concern about the future of classes here. He would like to see everyone in the plant involved in the project. This is an interesting point: the president has already made the commitment, so if A. were concerned, he could have asked the president; the nature of his job causes him to interact with him on a regular basis, yet he clearly failed to talk about an issue that he says is important to him and the company. Also, the president could have mentioned this to A. since it was discussed at length last week, and it is something that the president said was important to the plant's future. It doesn't speak well of the present communication at Acme.

7/29
I brought in the latest draft of the document and there seemed to be more energy in the group. They revised some of the questions, particularly in the self-evaluations. D. mentioned that we should cut the number to five. The others saw no problem with the length of this section [seven questions]. D. didn't protest, which could either mean they convinced him or that he didn't think it was worth pursuing. The men keep relating that things "aren't changing." They refer to the lack of follow-through on previous ideas in the plant and express little faith that our classes will be any different. They also keep bringing up the firing of C.; that seems to have hurt this group a great deal. Maybe their expectations were too high or maybe things, indeed, aren't changing. It seems that in many WPP classes, people look for a "quick fix" and are disappointed when things don't appreciably change in a short span of time. I asked them how long it took for things to get the way they are.

"Years." Then I asked if there has been any change at all, and they acknowledged that "People are talking to each other more now." They began to discuss some small improvements, but they are still impatient.

I asked about the communication flow chart that the other class developed and how it was working. They said that it was working to a degree, more so in some departments than in others [which should be expected], but that the new crew leaders in the affected departments were yet to be appointed. This is very disappointing news, but A. said he would get on that. He said that this should have been done by now. [I agree.]

The group is adding rationale for the reviews and I am noting them for use when we devise the explanation sheet and prepare our presentation to the president. We will need to get the workers and the supervisors to believe in them if they are to have the desired impact.

8/3
A. was gone on vacation today. We revised the self-evaluation and the other two components, but they were much more satisfied with the co-worker and the supervisor sections than they were with the self-evaluation. They eliminated one question and reorganized the order of the others, thinking that the order would help establish the tone--an indication that they are grasping some of the concepts we emphasized earlier.

We also discussed the lingering C. issue. They conceded that their forms would probably not have helped this man. In a way, this is an important concession. They should not be trying to protect a worker who has, by contract, overstepped his allowable "incidents." I reminded them of their original purpose: to make good workers feel good, to show that good work is noticed. But we cannot expect to have the forms give out false praise for someone who doesn't deserve it, or protect someone when he is "subject to" termination. I also reminded them that they were eventually going to have to let go of the firing of C. and other past differences if they wanted to move on. They agreed--with the theory.

We then took a critical look at every question, the ways the questions were worded and even the order of presentation. We also tried to read the various interpretations people could make, and see if anything unintended was suggested by what we asked. All of these were good applications to the communication process, and from the way the group took to the task, it appears they understand these concepts.

Time was up [as usual]. I asked them to think about what they wanted to say in the questions on the supervisors' forms. B. said that would be a tough one; all agreed.

8/5
G. was not in class today. We went over the employee review and the men gave it their final stamp of approval. I covered what we had left to do and how much time we had to do it; most hadn't realized how short time was. We began to draft the supervisors' review and some good things came of it. In particular, A. began to see what the men really want from him.

I reminded them that they were trying to make a document that people would feel comfortable in using. If the purpose of the employee review is to give some positive feedback, is that also what they wanted the supervisor review to do? They had trouble with that question, particularly the production workers, and didn't come up with a mutual consensus at this time. I don't feel my role is to tell them what they should be doing; rather I should be making them aware of the implications of their ideas and get them to see as many different perspectives as possible. I want them to make knowledgeable decisions rather than impulsive ones. B. especially seems to view the supervisor form as an opportunity to take some shots at supervision.

D. seems quite quiet while F. is becoming steadily more vocal, and A. tends to do all the right things while he is in class but he has trouble applying them outside it. A. did more listening than talking as we developed the supervisors' form, which could be a good sign. He resisted any attempts to defend, and his body language indicated that he was not uncomfortable over some of the things on which the men wanted to rate supervisors.

8/10
F. came in early again. He began to discuss the class and its progress, as well as A's actions outside of class. "He talks to the guys more and stuff, but he has trouble doing what we talk about in here. He seems to forget it all when he leaves." I asked, "When and where did he learn his job? Who taught him his 'management style'?" F. reviewed a previous supervisor who was a "tyrant" and seemed to enjoy reprimanding the men and/or firing them [not an unusual perception workers have of management]. Then we talked about how things were long ago and how long it would take a man who was used to leading one way to make changes. F. understands all this in theory, but he continues to retreat into his victim's role and lament his plight. He also wants to see some instant changes in A. Of all the students, he seems least disturbed about C's firing, yet he is less optimistic about the project in general.

As the others came in, they again expressed a pessimistic view of the chances of their reviews being used for any length of time. Still, we were able to revise the latest draft of the supervisors' forms. We began to discuss rationale for what we were doing so that they could be prepared for the presentation to the president. I tried to get them to come up with questions anyone could ask about what they were doing, and when they ran out of ideas I played devil's advocate and tried to find flaws in their reasoning. This is an important phase of their preparation, since they must acknowledge that others may not see things the same way they do, and they need to be prepared to answer tough questions and explain their thinking to others.

8/12
We worked on the upcoming presentation to the company president. We tried to decide who would be the best person to answer various anticipated questions. This was to get everyone involved as well as make sure that the person with the best background and the strongest convictions addressed a particular issue. We also had to work on the logistics of getting the information to the workers, as well as the details of getting the thing off the ground. There was some regression here; B. wanted to say it was up to supervision, while I told them that this philosophy hadn't worked in the past and probably wouldn't now. They will have to assume responsibility for their project and see that workers are informed about it. They will have to keep asking if their forms are being used. They didn't care for this--they'd rather absolve themselves of responsibility and hand it all to supervision. But they began to get their proposal together and we left the final drafts with the president. I felt it is a good idea to give him time to think about this before he comes in to discuss it with the class. I'm confident he will come in prepared, ask good questions and give them pretty straight answers. In the other sessions he worked well with the men. In essence, he becomes a fellow collaborator and works with them on their projects.

8/17
The president seemed to have mixed emotions on the review. He liked the idea, for the most part, but he was especially concerned about its potential for protecting a poor employee. The group pointed out that it was designed to be a vehicle for promoting good communication between supervision and workers, as well as making people feel good about their work. F. pointed out that it should help the overall productivity if it could help make people feel better about working there. It also would be a means of working with people to make them better rather than simply "writing them up" or firing them. It seemed that the president wanted to put this idea in to place, but he hesitated on reviewing everyone in the plant twice yearly; he was concerned over the time and the paperwork. He

suggested they go to a yearly report, and the men felt that would be no serious problem.

It was clear that we hadn't done enough work on just how to put the project in place. Again, the one-hour sessions were not long enough to accomplish all we needed to get done. I don't have a good feeling about this project, since the group will have to be willing to take a major role in getting it going and they may not have the faith/initiative to do that. A. is the key. He can make this project go if he believes in it, which he does now, but he still has that reputation for letting good ideas die on the vine.

G. brought up the C. incident again. He stated that some of the things on their sheet should have been considered in C's case. The president obviously didn't like discussing this issue. He said that C. was called in several times and warned about his tardiness etc. and that he had ample opportunity to change. They felt they did the best thing for the company by letting him go.

Obviously the president didn't like to be cast in the role of the "heavy" on this. He sees himself as a man who gives everyone a fair chance and he doesn't want people to assume that it wasn't done here. It bothered him enough to talk to me after class. I tried to get him to see G's questions in a positive light. It showed that the men don't always see things the way management sees them, and that it lets us know that there is still more work to be done here. But it also indicates that communication is opening up. G. could have let the rumors stew, but he felt comfortable talking to him about it, asked honest questions and got honest answers. Many in the plant may have felt the same way, but at least now he knew what was being said and had an opportunity to present his case. They all needed to know that there was another side to this story; he handled it well and in the future they may be more comfortable about asking him about things rather than fostering rumors among themselves. It also let them know that he will stand firm when he thinks he is right.

D. MacMaster
Observation of R. Lessard 8/17/93

This is the last session for the pilot group, the class I began with here almost three months ago. In many ways, I think the other classes have passed them by because this group has been unable or unwilling to relinquish old baggage and move forward. C's termination really divided them, pitting B., E. and G. squarely against A. Both B. and E. are looking for employment somewhere else, so their attitudes are bitter. A. has missed a number of classes because he has been on vacation. G. has missed because of vacations and, with him, work comes first. F. has been a mainstay, while D. has shown inconsistent dedication.

In spite of these barriers, Rich has facilitated well here, guiding the group toward the completion of an impressive document--an employee appraisal form which the men prefer calling a Progress Report. The paper is made up of three sections--a section where the employee evaluates him or herself, a section in which a peer (chosen by the employee) evaluates the worker, and a third section where a supervisor (chosen by the worker) gives his evaluation. Then after the Progress Report is complete, the employee sits down with the supervisor and they discuss the employee's performance.

The idea behind the form was to get something in the employee's file that is positive. Presently, the only information that gets filed is negative, in the form of write-ups. The men keep coming back to this example: "if C. had something like this in a file, something that showed that he was a good worker, maybe he wouldn't have been let go."

Unfortunately, the rationale behind the Progress Report has been inextricably bound to the sad case of C., who was fired because he kept showing up late for work. While it was agreed that C. was a good guy who cared about the company and was more productive than most workers, management could not tolerate his continued tardiness and eventually canned him.

The report demonstrates considerable thought and has the potential to do what the workers say they want done. But the men have not made the break with the C. situation and then when the president sat down with them to discuss this "Report," G. confronted him in his own way about the unjust treatment C. received. Even before G. finished, the president started to flare. As Rich pointed out later, the president seems to want to get along with everybody, and the widespread perception within the plant that C. was jobbed tweaks him personally. He got mad at G., saying that there was another side of the story; that if he had only have been on time for 30 consecutive days he could've begun to erase some of the writeups that were accumulating in his file. They gave him every chance; "it's not like the ball was out of his court."

G. accepted the explanation without comment, though I doubt he changed his mind. In a way, it was a good sign that G. felt secure enough to say what he thought to the president. Honest expression as a prelude to trust is what he said he wanted to foster with these classes. But still, you can see it is hard for him when he feels he has been unjustly accused of being the heavy in an unpopular move. Rich makes this point afterward and the president comes around quickly to this point of view. Whether he buys it personally is another question. He is, as one of his employees put it, no dummy, and he can be hard to read at times. All in all, I am impressed with his commitment. He's not only put his money where his mouth was, he's backed it up by demonstrating interest and commitment to what's coming out of these classes. He's not just delivering lip service, though he certainly be capable enough to get away with it. He seems as interested as we are in what we think about the changes that are occurring here, and that strikes me as a very good sign.

The president buys the thought behind the progress reports, but see through quickly to the logistical complications the forms entail. Also, while he is sympathetic to their feeling that the men want something positive in their files, I'm not sure he believes that this potential morale-booster outweighs the paperwork and the potential for factions to use this as a blunt instrument to hammer someone. He points out the problem supervisors will encounter scheduling meetings with each employee to discuss their evaluations; in a company of fifty, if progress reports are done every six months, that would amount to two meetings a week, many of which would fall on the plant manager. Assuming that these meetings were substantive, they would require at least 30 minutes per meeting, which would amount to another hour per week out of a supervisor's time. This form is going to require a sustained sell or it'll die on the vine.

But it doesn't seem likely that the group, as it is represented here today, has the desire and determination to breathe life into their creation. They did a rather weak job of selling the idea and cannot separate the positive, long-term implications of this form from the C. issue. Consequently, I see the president saying, "Good work," to these guys because it was good work, but not being as eager to back it as he was the communications flow chart and the quality circles the other groups came up with. It will be interesting in the months down the road to see if the men of the pilot group follow through or if they let it drop, collectively throw up their hands and say, "What's the use?"

August 12, 1993

Dear

In our extended problem-solving class we have come up with a "job progress report." The intention of this report is to put some positive things in a worker's file. Right now, the file is a collection of negative "incidents." A more positive attitude will help the future of Tawas Plating. We feel that by implementing this program we can create and give employees positive feedback, boost morale, as well as improve production and quality.

We would like to meet with you at 9:00 on August 17th to review this project and answer any questions you may have. Thank you for the opportunity to finish this project.

Sincerely,

JOB PROGRESS REPORT Date ________

Employee's Name ________________________________

Please answer the following questions related to your job.

1. What are your strong points?

2. What do you see as your most important job responsibility?

3. Do you think you could handle more responsibility in this department or in another? Explain.

4. Do you have enough time to do your job well? Explain or give examples.

5. What ideas of yours have been used in the past? Give some examples of how they have or haven't been used in the past.

6. How can we help you improve your work or your workplace?

7. Are you getting adequate leadership and support from supervision? Explain.

Co-worker Section [selected by the person above]
Please honestly answer the following questions about the above worker. Use the number code below to show:
[1] **Always** [2] **Usually** [3] **Never**

1. Does he get along with other workers __
2. Does he stay on the job or in his work area? __
3. When he has time, does he help out others? __
4. Is the quality of his work good? __
5. Is he trustworthy and responsible? __
6. Does he follow safety regulations? __
7. Does he care about the reputation of the company? __
8. Does he respect the duties and the work of others? __.

Signature ______________________________

Supervisor Section [The employee selects a foreman, a dept. leader, or another supervisor.]
Please honestly answer the following questions about the employee.

1. Do you agree with the assessments above? Explain.

2. Are you satisfied with this employee's work? Explain.

3. What are this employee's strengths?

4. Could this employee handle more responsibility?

5. What recent contributions/ideas has this employee offered?

Signature ______________________________

SUPERVISORS' PROGRESS REPORT

Supervisor's Name ______________________________ Date _______

Please note if the following statements apply to the above supervisor: [1] Always [2] Usually [3] Never. Do you think this supervisor ---

1. follows safety regulations? __
2. is a good leader? __
3. is a good communicator? __
4. is a good listener? __
5. gets along with fellow employees? __
6. is responsible? __
7. treats all workers fairly? __
8. understands workers' personal problems? __
9. strives for quality production? __
10. takes time to talk and listen to workers? __
11. schedules work loads fairly and properly? __
12. seems confident with his position? __
13. is willing to accept changes & change himself? __
14. understands and responds to problems well? __
15. allows time for proper training? __
16. clearly understands workers' job responsibilities? __
17. gives a reasonable amount of time to do a job? __
18. does more than is asked of him? __
19. accepts input and feedback from the workers? __

Please add any additional important information about this supervisor.

Signature ______________________

JOURNAL
Communications: 6/23 - 7/16
Students H., I., J., K., L., M. & N.

6/23

To begin with, I wasn't quite sure what to expect here. I had heard from Don that there were serious communication problems at Acme and much of that stemmed from a latent hostility between certain factions in the plant. Since I had no voice in the make-up of the class, I wasn't sure how members were selected and what past conflicts would surface as we went along. I still wanted to use the learner-driven agenda, so I went in prepared to let them work toward those topics most important to them. In the back of my mind, I had thought out various options, but for the most part, I felt I had to wait to see how things went that first day. Such uncertainty seems to be the pattern of WPP classes. The students have typically little patience with standardized instruction and tolerate few "assignments." They usually prefer a highly pragmatic, local agenda.

Tough group--after introductions, I related that the class was generally going to be about communicating in the workplace and that we would deal with the issues that they felt were most important to them. They could take things in just about any direction they preferred, as long as we could feel we accomplished something at the conclusion of the class. I asked them to jot down a few ideas on what they thought we should be dealing with in the class and we would discuss them.

H. [tossing his pen in the middle of the table]: "If this class is supposed to be about communication, we may as well go home because there ain't none here; we're just wasting our time."
Silence. I let them stew in it for a while.
Me: "So you're satisfied with the way things are?"
Several: "Hell no, but it's management that needs to learn how to communicate, not us; if management won't do anything, we can't. It's up to management to make the changes. We can't tell them what to do."
[Ah, absolving the self of any responsibility by fixing the blame on others--not a new defense mechanism.]
Me: "Remember, management has sponsored these classes; they are paying you for coming here, giving you released time. Doesn't that say that they'd like to see some things change?" [long silence]
H.: "This place has deteriorated so far that there ain't no hope. We aren't going to change a thing here. This class is just a waste of time."
Me: "Okay, let's talk about some of what you call the 'noncommunication' problems here."

At this point H. chose an example of an exchange in the office involving K. and other supervisors, after which nothing changed. K. defended it and tried to explain the other side but H. wasn't about to listen. It was a brief but nasty exchange.

L. "All right, you guys. You guys ain't communicatin'; you're just fighting. We've had enough of that here."

He turned things around with that statement. The guys seem to respect L. and he seems to have the best instincts in the class. He is great to have here. This is a very angry and volatile group and he has already shown a real calming effect on them. I noticed right away, when he talks, others listen. His ideas are very good and they respect that.

We then moved to a more constructive approach. I went around the table and asked each person to respond to the original question; each offered a problem in communication and I began to write them on the flip chart. They generally griped and took shots at various people, but perhaps this is something the groups are going to have to work through in order to clear the air a bit. H. wanted to remain with the most negative of the topics that came up, and I'm wondering if there is some vested interest he has in maintaining the status quo. However, the others got on with the matters at hand, and in spite of himself, he began to contribute. The others were considerably more task-oriented, but there is a general air of futility here. There just isn't much optimism that they are going to be able to make many positive changes in their work environment. In spite of this, the group produced some good suggestions for things the class could focus on, and at L's suggestion, they decided the place to begin was working on an effective chain of communication the plant workers could follow.

I gave them a reading precision sheet that could be interpreted in several ways, just to show that there is more than one way to look at a situation. This they did individually and later in groups. Afterward we discussed the breakdown between message and interpretation, followed by a group dynamics self-evaluation test. H. wanted to make sure that he got in a barb about how it sounded like typical "college stuff" and J. expressed his dissatisfaction with the self-evaluation as well. It took J. a very long time to do the things he had to read. He didn't graduate from high school, so education was probably not a real positive experience for him.

6/25

Coming down today, I had some serious apprehensions about this class after the last session. I'm sure K. was not real anxious to come back after some of the things that H. had said on Wednesday. I asked for their reactions to the first class and called for suggestions for future sessions. The feedback was unanimously positive [which surprised me; they seemed to appreciate the opportunity to 'clear the air' on a few things and were ready to get started on changing things]. Things were out in the open now, and we could get on with some problem-solving. It appears that many of the men have been holding frustrations inside for too long and needed to vent some of them. K. had a positive reaction too, and I'm very glad, for I felt he took a lot of heat that first day. H. has seemed to temper some of his hostility, a big turn-around from the first day. He was a real trooper today; he still emits that air of futility, but he contributes more than any two of the others. He has a lot to say and much of it is turning out to be more constructive than I expected. N. gets caught up in pointing and blaming, but he is beginning to catch himself and the rest help him, and try bringing things back to the issues. They are beginning to understand the need to direct things at issues and take things in a less personal manner, in theory. It is still difficult for them to put it into practice. There are some habits that have been perpetuated here for too long.

We reviewed sender-message-receiver-feedback chain in communicating in general, and worked mostly on the message phase. They brainstormed the best ways to get a message across and they got very good at selecting the language that would make the receiver think, feel and understand things the way they wanted him to. I saved the obligations of a receiver for the next session. I wanted to move on with the idea they brought up in the last class.

L. brought in a draft of a communication flow chart and we worked on it for over an hour. They occasionally got sidetracked and wanted to point fingers and blame for present conditions, but they stayed on task for the most part. Usually one of them got us refocused and I didn't have to do much of prompting. I'd say everyone contributed very well, except that I. seems to be a more introverted person. He contributes when asked but doesn't volunteer a lot yet.

We'll need to compose an explanation sheet to go with the flow chart. The guys are bringing up subtle nuances that need to be clarified to the men on the floor before we can hope to see it used to its full potential. I'm not sure everyone will understand things if we try to make the chart stand on its own.

6/30
The plant was short on help today so K. and H. were called to the floor to work. That meant that there were no supervisors represented today's group. It proved to be both good and bad. We needed their input but it "forced" the small group to get much more out of each member. I. especially had more to say today and he seems to be a good thinker, though not a real optimistic one. J. has had some past communication problems with his wife and he related that to some of the arguments which have taken place at work. It was a very good analogy and fit in well with the difference between what we think we are saying and what the receiver is hearing. M's contributions continue to fluctuate between productive and cynical. L. proves to provide a stabilizing effect; he's clearly the strongest link in the group, has the most insight and makes the most positive contributions to the project. N. was particularly quiet today. There was some talk before class about the guys being upset about vacation issues and we could have discussed that, but I didn't want to lose our focus at this point. Maybe we should have, maybe not.

We began to review their flow chart. I drafted a copy and ran it off for them to consider. I keep reminding them that they don't want to insulate people from each other [but maybe some of that is needed]. Cutting some people off from others could actually hinder the communication process. They're having a lot of trouble making it say what they want it to say but they're sticking with it. They feel it is important, that it will assure that when people need to know things, they will be informed, which isn't the case now. People are circumventing others who need to know what is going on in their departments, there is overcorrecting of problems and shift changes leave people unaware of what happened in the shift before them.

I decided to try the conflict test to have them self-assess the ways they handle themselves in conflicting situations, and then we went through what various categories meant. We also discussed what a receiver can do to give the right kind of feedback to senders, which will help promote trust and honesty. At first they didn't recognize the need for active listening, asking questions, confirming what they understand, etc. so I had to explain those things to them.

They have had "quality circles" here in the past and they have simply faded away. The group would like to revive them so they have some input on decisions but the flow chart remains the top priority. If we finish with the flow chart in time, we hope to work on the quality circles next. They also agreed that things have improved under the new administration and that the president will listen to them. This is good to hear; we now know that he is giving us more than lip service to this project. He believes in more consensus management and wants to make some changes. But he also seems sharp enough to realize that these changes have to take place gradually, since so many negatives have come about over the period of several years.

7/2
No H. or K. today. The guys spent some time talking about the role of these two. H. [a foreman] may be their strongest link in supervision, in the eyes of the workers. He is trusted by the men and they feel he is "one of them" rather than just supervision. Could this be his vested interest in maintaining things as they are? He could feel that as long as he is one of the few trusted supervisors, he can enjoy a rapport with them that he could lose if others become better communicators. He is quite a walking paradox. At times he is so negative and confrontational that he undermines the efforts of the others in class, yet he also shows a real understanding and some excellent insights into what should be done to make the place better, as well as some genuine compassion for others.

K. is the one they complain about the most, when he is not in the class. M. even mentioned that after K. left our first session he went out and discussed with others some of what was said, which they agreed would be kept confidential. Just how much of this was done, if any, may be subject to question, but if they really believe he is doing that, it makes for a suspicious atmosphere. I've noticed that K. seems to operate on the parent-child theory, and as he said the first day, "There are many things in this plant that you guys don't need to know. The plant will run better if management keeps some of the important decisions to themselves." Hmm.

They are very upset over an interpretation of the language on vacation time. Some, I. for example, lost as much as a week because of a difference in interpretation in the new contract. Since the union is new and this is their first contract, some of the language ends up being interpreted differently by management than it is by the workers. There seems to be a lot of work to do with that contract. From our standpoint, things like the vacation issue are really hurting the progress of our project. It creates pessimism toward what we are trying to accomplish here. They feel that some supervisors are the enemy and look for ways to jack them around. Suspicion is alive and well here.

We revised the chart and worked on a first draft of the cover letter to be presented to the president. They did a nice job with the letter and worked together well on it. Everyone made a contribution, but L. did much of the real grunt work. It would have been nice to have K. and H. there to represent supervision, but maybe it was better to force some of the others to say more without them. Those two, perhaps because of their positions/personalities, tend to say more than the rest. The present situation allowed me to draw out the quieter ones more.

Observation: The president hasn't been around and the supervisors haven't been coming to class--is there a connection?

7/7
J. and H. are on vacation. K. was back; he is a hard one to figure. After what the guys said, I'm not sure if he believes in what we are doing or he is just giving lip service to the whole project. M. is conspicuously quieter when he is here. L. and K. still carry the bulk of the workload in the class, although N. was pretty active this time. This group is beginning to work very well together; they still are having trouble being open and honest, perhaps because the trust isn't there. With their feelings about K., maybe they don't really believe the rules we set down about things "staying in the room" are being followed. M. remains the chief cynic of the group. I'm not sure if that is the way his personality sees humor or if he is attempting to approach the truth, as he sees it, through his off-handed remarks. He often gets into personalities and individuals.

We worked on revising the letter, then worked on the chart again. As we began to explain it on paper, we saw that there were things that needed to be shown on the chain. We discussed various options on timing our presentation, and they decided it would be best to present it to the president on Wednesday so that we could process things on Friday. The revisions took the whole session. K. indirectly demonstrates his power over the group. It isn't so much that he exerts it; they just seem to hand it to him. I have to watch that and make sure to draw out the ideas of the others and ask them things like, "Will that work in your department?" etc.

We also made plans for our presentation. One of the complaints they have registered about supervision is that they aren't all on the same page [or even in the same book, as M. put it]; they keep getting conflicting answers to questions. I want them to see how important it is to have a united front before they present things to a group or individual.

7/9
H. is still missing. We went over the letter and the chart, briefly. Then we worked on an explanation sheet to go with the chart. We approached it from the standpoint of trying to anticipate the questions by people who are seeing the chart for the first time. We also talked about how to respond to those people who might be opposed to using it. I felt it was good for them to realize that some people will not like to make changes, period, and some may not see the value of this particular change. We made a list of anticipated questions and brainstormed answers. They acknowledged that it may be up to them to make it work, a big step from that first day when they were willing to leave it all up to supervision. They are beginning to understand that things have to be approached in the right ways, with more tact, and that the receiver must maintain some dignity after asking questions and making comments. They also worked on which questions/changes would be most difficult to sell. K. seems to be particularly sold on the chart and likes the idea of supervisors being free to do their jobs. He also affirmed I.'s comment about everybody in a particular department being informed about what is happening. They seemed to agree that the crew leaders could provide the key to making the flow chart work. If information flows through them, they can help see that people on either side of them go through channels. This also means appointing a department leader in "Heat Treat" and that would likely be I.; it would involve a 25 cent per hour increase and he is not real comfortable asking for that, but the others said they would handle that end of it, that he could remain quiet when we get to that. Another good step; they recognize that it will make a difference who is presenting particular things in some instances.

I still have some reservations about the chart's potential of insulating of some people from others, but I can also see that if department leaders will take more responsibility, it could prevent most of that, as well as make the whole communication process flow much more efficiently. For example, when something goes wrong now, a worker may adjust the tanks, and when parts come out of the tanks, the crew leader will adjust the tanks, and when the foreman sees the flawed parts, he adjusts the tanks, and finally, when QC sees the flawed parts come down the line, he adjusts the tanks. People have got to begin to communicate about what is being done on the floor. Also, it seems that some people are getting orders from all directions and they don't really know where to go with a particular problem, so some insulation might work in favor of the communication process. People will at least be catching less criticism from fewer places. Time was very short today. They were really concentrating on the chart and how to sell it to others.

Although I didn't want to do it this way, [I was used to bringing in typed notes of the previous session for the class to review] I left the question/answer sheet with K. to type up and give to the guys so that they could go over it before we talked to the president. They needed them for review before the next class met, so I couldn't take them back to the office. He was highly enthusiastic about doing this and getting the men the sheets. I asked that they decide who was going to deal with each question so that no one would be expected to memorize the whole list and no one would be dominating the presentation. They all signed the letter and I left our latest draft of the flow chart along with the letter on the president's so he'd have some time to think about it before we talked about it. I wanted to talk to him, but he's hard to catch; there is more than one building here and he is in and out a lot. Let's hope K. can get this to them in a timely manner and not be too directive. Also, if he is breaking the confidence of the group, he may not have been a good one to leave the list with. But it's also a chance to place more responsibility on the group and wean them from my help. It's a chance I took as a show of confidence and let's hope it works out.

7/14
H. was the first one in class. He had all the sheets we had worked on and the others brought him up to date on what we had done in his absence [that was a good sign, indeed]; he seemed excited and pleased with what the class had accomplished and showed little of his previous negativism. It appears that K. held up his end very well and I was glad I had shown that trust in him; they all had the sheets. We spent a few minutes getting ready and H. gave us some added input as a fresh reader. He was very good. The guy is a hard one to read, a living paradox, but he can really help the group when he puts his mind to it.

The presentation was **very** positive. There was a barrier-free collaborative effort to revise the chart and the accompanying explanation sheet. The president was just one of the group; the men saw him model the kind of management style I think he would like to see implemented in the plant. At first, K. had to do too much of the talking; they didn't divide up the questions and answers as I had hoped, but eventually everyone got into it except J., who remained silent throughout. They really focused on the issues well, stayed away from personalities, and seemed quite honest. H. was especially helpful and showed a supervisor's perspective. I was impressed with what they did. For the most part, I took a back seat and let them work things out. It's what they are able to do after we leave that matters and I was gratified by their honesty and poise. [Don was observing and took notes--see his attached report.]

The president didn't like the "top-down" look of the chart's vertical representation, so we made a new one which indicated a funnel system which flowed through the crew leaders. I suggested turning the chart on its side to indicate a horizontal flow, and he liked that concept much better. Without reservation, he bought the idea of creating the position for the new crew leader. K. took most of the responsibility for presenting the rationale which helped keep I. and M. out of it. M. and H. also chimed in with good reasons for working through crew leaders. Unfortunately, N. [a crew leader now] was gone.

After all were satisfied with the revisions, we moved to the actual implementation of the chart. How can we get things started? They decided that it would be best if all supervisors, QC, and crew leaders would meet with our group to have it explained to them to be advised of its importance. "If we can convince these people it will work, they can help implement it and 'gently enforce' the use of the channels of communication," said the president.

They will do this in our next session. It will really press us, but I like the idea of having the men take charge and run a meeting with supervision present. It may make them more comfortable with doing these sorts of things once the classes are over. But we have some closure things to take care of and I'm not sure we'll get it all in.

7/16
We began with the final ironing of the horizontal flow chart, then prepared for the meeting with the people who would be involved in making it work. I suggested that using specific examples would help them see its value. They reviewed the anticipated questions and discussed why the chart was needed and important. We did some closure things for the class, but it was rushed. I would like to have reviewed the communication and problem-solving processes as they related to our class activities, and how to continue doing what we did. Time ran short and we didn't review as much as I would have liked.

Throughout this whole session H. was very good again. He is a real team player when it comes to crunch time. [He also serves to remind us of the dangers in first impressions--and to have faith in a guy, because he can come through when he is needed. I also think that the time he was gone gave him the idea that his negative attitude was being left behind.] The group seems very aware that there are problems which will come up in dealing with the chart and there will be some people who won't want to use it. But they talked this out and helped devise answers to negative questions. By the time the others came in they were confident they could deal with their questions.

In the meeting with supervision and crew leaders, K. was again the leader, although in the preliminary meeting he said he shouldn't be--but the others just didn't want to take the initiative. K. seems bothered by silence and wants to rush things, maybe oversimplify them. The concept of management by consensus seems too slow for him and I'm not sure he is ready to implement it. The president and L. chimed in and provided the examples that helped clarify things. It was an easy sell. One of the supervisors who had not been in the class saw where we had omitted a worker on the chart, perhaps a minor position, but the chart has to be revised. Still, all were pleased with the prospects of the flow chart. The general discussion centered on how this could be a way of making sure affected parties are informed, as well as helping workers deal with fewer numbers of people. "This is a way of making sure nobody is missed, yet it keeps problems away from people who shouldn't have to deal with them." (L.)

One supervisor was worried that QC wouldn't know what was going on and wouldn't know what to tell customers if they should ask. K. assured him that department leaders would not be making QC decisions and it was their responsibility to keep him informed on changes being made. He noted pointed out that the arrows and the flow of communication must go both ways. All understood that supervisors can't be allowing people to circumvent the flow and leaving people in the dark.

Everyone seems to have a highly positive attitude toward the chart. As an outsider, it seems so obvious that I'm amazed they needed this class to do it. I can't see why it wasn't done years ago. It makes so much sense that I marvel at the surprise in everyone's eyes when they first see it. Still, it was so badly needed here that it could turn out to be one of the most valuable projects we do.

Afterthoughts: By way of criticism, I'd say we got too caught up in the specific issue of the flow chart and didn't concentrate enough time on the communication *process*, especially with the closure at the end. The chart is a very valuable thing for this plant and could make a tremendous difference in the working environment. But this is a good group and I feel they have great potential to attack future issues and work through them--if they are cognizant the process and can apply it. Still, I'm gratified by the way they handled things in the final presentations to the president and the supervisors. I think they did an excellent job with *this* problem; can they do the same with others? I think so, but only time will tell.

Macmaster
Administrative Observation
of Dr. Lessard 7/12/93

This group has made impressive strides on creating a communications flow chart for the company. The impetus for a change here is that often QC is asked or is compelled to make changes in production on the spot, bypassing the department leaders. Or someone on the line with a minor problem bypasses every step in the chain of command and comes knocking on the president's door, which results in his having to deal with a considerable amount of minor stuff that should be handled closer to home. Too often the left hand has no idea what the right hand is doing, resulting in ruffled feathers and quality problems.

Rich has done a good job of getting this group to define a problem that can be solved and to focus on solutions that could work. (He expressed concern on the way down about a pair of leaders who were negative at first and progressed enough to give lip service to the problem-solving process, but may not be sold on it at this point. When we talked ten days ago, Rich was worried that the attitude of these two might hamper the presentation to the president. As supervisors, they might have the most to lose by flattening the decision-making process. With the president coming in today, ostensibly to evaluate, Rich was worried that these two could turn the presentation in the wrong direction.)

As it turned out, the class went extremely well. The president perused the flow chart, uncomfortable with the vertical structure but obviously impressed with the sophistication of their product and its potential for immediate application. He went to the flip chart and experimented unsuccessfully with a circular model, then working off a comment from one of the students, Rich came up with the idea of flipping the flow chart on its side in order to emphasize the principle of two-way communication flow, funnelling through the crew leaders, and de-emphasizing the single president at the "top."

The president is trying to institute a more cooperative management style here. As he worked through the chart and the accompanying document with the group, an outsider could see that what they were actively engaged in was a style of management he seeks to institute. I'm not sure how much of that was brought to the conscious level, but it was neat to see how the object of the lesson and its execution dovetailed so nicely.

Some other observations:

1) there was pride of ownership in the chart and document
2) the two men Rich was worried about did a fine job

3) the president not only saw how the group works together, he was working as a member of the team, he was one of them
4) the president mentioned at one point, "You guys are doing a real good selling job."
5) the new president has inherited a number of problems. As a younger man, new to the company, he has a number of things working against him. Yet, to the man, they say they trust him.

After class we had a productive discussion with the president. He wants to keep going with the classes, figuring that he has three more classes to go. He agreed that the pilot group needs another eight hours to finish their project and thinks the other group should focus now on selling their flow chart to the rest of the plant. I broached the idea of following some productivity measures to quantify impact of our project and he bought into that, identifying a measure I hadn't heard or thought about before: wage to sales. Very promising. I need to devise a model of indicators to track, and a system to track them then send that down to him for his consideration. He says he keeps track of all indicators on a monthly basis.

Some other comments from the president:

(1) One of the best things he's seen from this so far is the fact that people who in the past have either been not used or unable to deal with each other can now sit down together and work through problems. He made a neat visual for how when we arrive he has to move to the small office up the hall and how nice it is for him to hear through the wall laughter and productive dialogue.

(2) He believes that the men are coming out of the classes with a better attitude, he says others have seen it, and he concludes that the attitude of others signing up for class will be more positive.

(3) He was impressed with the amount of quality work that come out of the communication flow chart.

(4) He was also impressed by the way they uncovered the real problem and how quickly they came up with an idea to solve it. The class is moving in exactly the direction he wants the company to take, moving away from authoritarian one-way management to quality teams and problem-solving.

(5) He wants to continue with classes. "You'd be a fool to pass this up." Pleased that we decided to go with the communications classes first over the math or reading. (When he approached the men asking what classes they'd like to take, one mentioned auto-body.)

(6) The company recently went through a bitter union battle which put on hold a lot of positive things that were ongoing - such as the newsletter and the quality circles. Both times the union vote came up in the plant, it was decided by 3 or 4 votes (rejected the first time, voted in the second), so there is no general consensus. "No matter what you do, about half the people are unhappy either way."

July 9, 1993

Dear :

As a result of our 080 Communications class, this group has learned that teamwork and open communication produces positive results. There is a need to keep steady contact with each other and keep the channels of communication open so that we're all informed about how the company is operating. Also, we can help eliminate rumor and speculation. The group would like to present a proposal for the organization of a "communication chain" for the plant. Presently we feel there is a breakdown in communications, causing inefficiency and morale problems. Working toward a team approach will upgrade production and quality, as well as promote more trust and respect between supervision and production by taking some of the strain off supervision.

Each individual would know where he fits in to the overall production picture and how and where to start the communication process. With communication going both ways, individuals would have more input about production and fellow workers. In the class we learned that teamwork and using everyone's ideas is helpful in solving problems; it would also help the efficiency and quality of this company.

Sincerely,

[Group #2]

ANTICIPATED QUESTIONS AND RESPONSES

WHY HAVE THE CHART? Presently there is too little communication. The chart shows lines of communication that we feel will keep everyone informed with the information that is important to their work and responsibilities. In addition, the chart shows those that may not know who to go to with questions or problems, the proper position that they should consult.

HOW WILL THE CHART IMPROVE ANYTHING? By following this communication chart we feel that people will be better informed, therefore speculation will be reduced. Hopefully people, since they will know the proper person to talk to, will ask questions that they may have and have answers to those questions. It allows for better interaction between the people that are involved in the problem, question or day to day operations. The chart does make allowances for the opportunity for anyone to come to those at the top of the chart when necessary, otherwise we prefer that problems, etc. be solved where they are actually occurring. The solutions can be presented to those at the top of the list. An additional benefit of this line of communication is that, we feel that it will actually free the president from many of the problems he now deals with so that he can devote more time to his duties.

WHY THIS ORDER? It allows for problems, etc. to be taken to the proper place in order that they can be acted upon by those that are most knowledgeable with the processes, machines, etc. This chart will help to encourage teamwork, which at this time we are lacking of. The bigger or more serious problems still must be addressed at the top of the communication chart.

HOW DO WE GET PEOPLE TO USE THE CHART? 1. We can lead by example, 2. Involve those people that we feel would be willing to use the system, 3. Show people how the chart can benefit them, 4. Gently force people to use the chain of communication.

WHY POSITIONS USED INSTEAD OF NAMES? Senior employees are familiar with both positions and names, new employees are not familiar with either. Positions may be more permanent than names. The chart would not have to be modified if personnel were to change at any position.

WILL EVERYONE UNDERSTAND THE CHART? No, but we are willing to take the time to explain it to anyone and everyone.

HOW CAN WE KEEP IT GOING? By using the system ourselves, lead by example and thru gentle enforcement.

HOW SERIOUS DOES THE PROBLEM HAVE TO BE BEFORE THE CHAIN IS SKIPPED? This decision and the responsibility for the decision would rest with the department leader or highest authority involved with the particular problem.

WHY THE NEED FOR A CREW LEADER? A crew leader position means that someone is responsible for both the good and bad that occurs in that department. It allows for increased communication in both directions. Increased communication, designated responsibility will lead to efficiency, quality and productivity improvements.

SHOW THE CONNECTION BETWEEN THE CHART AND TEAMWORK? By using the chart teamwork is an automatic benefit, it forces people to work together. The benefits of this are that: Trust is increased; morale increases; quality improves; productivity increases; and the stress/strain is reduced on everyone. Supervision rather than being involved in a lot of little problems that can be resolved without their involvement are now allowed the freedom to perform their duties.

DOESN'T THE CHART CUT PEOPLE OFF AT THE TOP OF THE CHART? No, we still have tools such as the newsletter, and quality circles. The chart if utilized actually frees those at the top to allow them more time for interaction with others.

[*Notice, posted to employees*]

COMMUNICATION CHAIN

> ***The purpose of this chart is to establish a normal communication chain within the company. The goal is to improve trust, morale cooperation and production. Each individual will know where he fits in the overall communication picture and how and where to start the communication process. Working toward a team approach will promote more trust and respect between everyone in the plant.***

The normal chain of communication will be used whenever possible in order to keep all affected parties informed. It is essential that communication goes both ways.

Crew leaders are the key to the communication process. Information must funnel through them both ways. It is imperative that you consult with crew leaders about any problems in their areas.

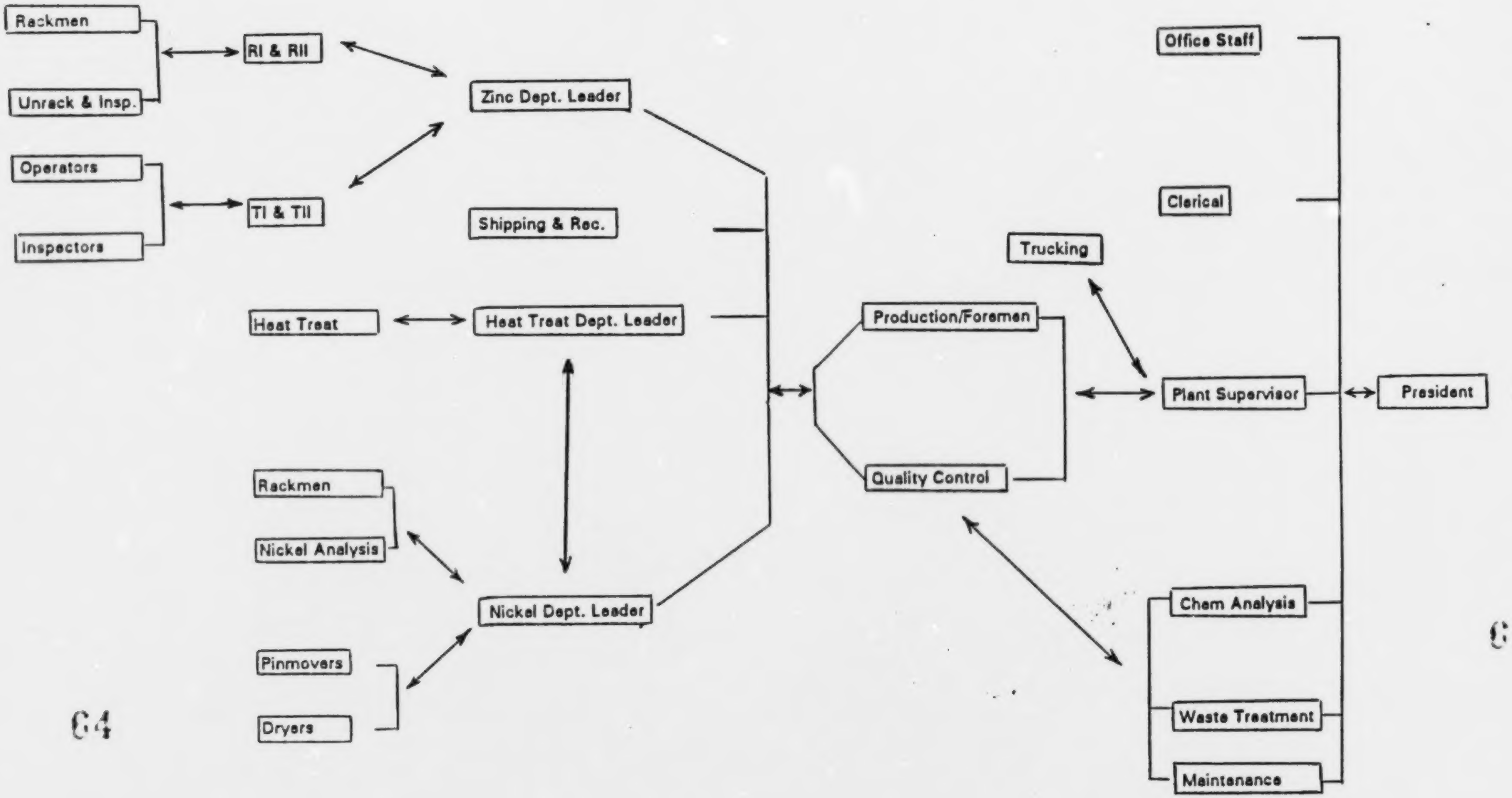
By following the chart, everyone will have access to Quality Control. Quality Control issues will be addressed cooperatively through the crew leaders and other parties involved.

By following the chart, everyone will have access to maintenance, waste treatment, chemical analysis, office staff, clerical and the president.

If you have any questions about this communication process, contact one of the following people:

[group members' names listed]

COMMUNICATION CHAIN


Rackmen
Unrack & Insp.
RI & RII
Operators
Inspectors
TI & TII
Zinc Dept. Leader
Shipping & Rec.
Heat Treat
Heat Treat Dept. Leader
Rackmen
Nickel Analysis
Nickel Dept. Leader
Pinmovers
Dryers
Production/Foremen
Quality Control
Trucking
Plant Supervisor
Office Staff
Clerical
President
Chem Analysis
Waste Treatment
Maintenance

Journal: WPP COMMUNICATIONS/PROBLEM-SOLVING

Group 3, Students: N2, O, P, Q, R, S, & T

7/22

This group seemed to show less of the initial anger and hostility that was shown in the first sessions of the other groups. They began by saying they had heard about the other classes, "saw what they did," and just wanted to get started, although they weren't sure just where to start. In the other groups, there often was a student or two who had a particular ax to grind, but that doesn't seem to be the case here. I see little evidence of the friction that was present in the other classes.

They seem comfortable talking and contributing in collaboration with one another. I had apprehensions about facing the typical first day problems we usually encounter, but I was pleasantly surprised by this group. They may even be a couple sessions ahead of the "typical" class. We even have five note takers in here, while in the past, only one or two would take the trouble.

The bulk of the time was spent on how to reestablish the quality circles. This was a topic of conversation in the last class as well, and I was pleased to see this group bring it up again. The men felt that these were very worthwhile, yet they were simply dropped; no one was able to tell why they were no longer used. I asked them to begin to brainstorm about what they would like the quality circles to do and how we could get them going again. I took notes on their ideas on the flip chart, showing them how the initial stages of problem-solving should work. Without realizing it, they were modeling the early stages of the problem-solving process. It was the most productive first session I have ever seen, or even heard about. N. is a real positive catalyst in here, a high energy student who keeps things going for the rest of the class.

I used the reading precision exercise to see if they could look at things from several perspectives, and they picked it up right away. Then I moved to the communication chain, how it begins with a thought or idea and flows to the final interpretation and feedback from the receiver. I was able to relate it to the various perspectives in the first exercise and they seemed to make the connections with what we needed to do in quality circles. Then I gave them a mini-lesson on problem-solving theory and how it could be used as we begin to develop our proposal on the quality circles. It was a productive session.

7/27
Again the group proved to be highly task-oriented, largely because of N. I am impressed with his constant flow of ideas. He is a very vocal person and pushes things along without being offensive or domineering. The group views what he is doing as a contribution rather than seeing him as trying to take over. They don't just take his suggestions at face value; they listen and then improve on his original ideas. On the other hand, they seem to hurry things without exploring all the ramifications of what they are suggesting. This could be the Achilles heel of this group.

They began to draft and revise rationale for reinstating the quality circles, supporting their ideas with successes of the circles that Acme had in the past. They decided that to keep a fresh flow of ideas coming in to the circles, they would need some incentives for workers to present ideas to the group. P. came up with some good ideas that were used in the past and some used at other places, which was good for him, since he is not the most vocal. In general, the entire group contributes something on almost every subject, with S. being the quietist. Q. is a good idea man with a positive attitude, and the others seem to value what he has to say. Good output today.

After class O. closed the door and related that the new president was in the habit of giving out pizzas or subs when they got a good rating from a customer. But during the union battles the stronger proponents of the union decided to boycott one of the sub gestures and the president was stuck with a lot of food. It didn't set well.

> O. We really had a battle over this one and I didn't bring it up here because it could have gotten nasty. Still, you needed to know what has gone on. It could affect our proposal for incentives for the quality circles. I wasn't in favor of the union and didn't take part in the boycott and Q. and I almost got in a fight over it. If I'd brought it up here it wouldn't have been very pleasant and I can guarantee you, it would have left this room.

It was important that this be brought to our attention. If the president has unpleasant memories of his efforts to give the men some small perks, it will hamper the group's efforts to develop an incentive system. But it is also a good sign that O. was willing to take me in confidence and tell me about something that could impact our proposal. If I can lay the proper groundwork, I'll take the risk of bringing this up in a future session. We really need to discuss how to deal with any backlash that may come about because of this.

7/29
We spent the bulk of our time revising. They are coming up with some good rationale and some excellent, realistic incentives. It is important that we deal with follow-up on this too. Keeping a good flow of ideas into the quality circles will help insure that they meet regularly. The suggestions should provide good material to work with. The class also discussed the follow-up on the suggestions themselves. The "idea man" needs to know what happened to his suggestion as soon as possible. To help facilitate this, they began to work on a response form for administration so that the circle and the idea man will be informed about what happened to his idea.

O. mentioned, partially in jest, that the idea might need to be protected. If the incentives were particularly lucrative, there is the potential of having ideas stolen. I asked if they felt this would be a serious problem, and most felt that it wouldn't--with most people. But just for peace of mind, they felt it would be good to put a lock on the suggestion box and separate it into individual sections for each circle. Q. said he would be glad to make the box any way we wanted it to be.

Then the issue of who would have the key was brought up. They concluded that it should be held by the chair of the circle, and N. (a supervisor) emphasized that the chair should not be a supervisor, since the circles should be run by the workers, not supervision. N: "The foreman or the crew leader should be just another member of the group. The circles won't work if management starts to dominate what goes on." T. added, "Right. It would defeat the whole intent of getting everyone's input if the foremen start to dominate these meetings." Good open and honest exchange by both men. The class then went on and established that there should be a chair and a recorder, who made sure that the necessary communication took place after each meeting was held.

Toward the end of the class, we gave the draft of the suggestion form a trial run. Each person filled out the suggestion form with an idea from his particular department. This was to test the sheet to see if it was going to be convenient, clear and effective. After using them, they felt that there was no need to change them. But they were protective of the ideas they had written down.

8/3
For the first hour of class we worked on revising the incentive sheet and the circle guidelines. During the discussion of incentives, the sandwich boycott came up and opened the door for some closure on that issue. Q. felt that the thing came about because the men saw the sandwiches as a way to buy votes against the unionization. T. added that those were very special circumstances and the circles were going to be very different. S. mentioned that the goals of the circles were to bring people together and the sandwich thing was just the opposite, a way to divide them. All very good points, so I asked them to let go of the past; mistakes were made by both sides and it was time to do something to make things better now. O. agreed that both sides did plenty of things wrong and there was no reason to point blame. All of the men felt that the president was not the type to hold a grudge over such a thing. P. noted that since that time the president had brought in pizza on occasion, so he must have been willing to let it go.

We discussed the various stages of the suggestions and who should be involved at each point. They feel that their best route at the present time is a direct one to the president, since other levels of supervision tend to ignore things that are suggested or that need to be changed. It provided me with an opportunity to review the way we were doing things in class as a "model" for the way things should work in the circles. Once an idea was discussed in circle, it would be hard to ignore, since many people would become familiar with it. Besides, they had developed forms that would go to more than one level of management, so no one could simply kill an idea through lack of action. The other group's flow chart should help too.

We began to look at some questions (and answers) that people might have after a first reading of our proposal. It is important that, when we present our proposal to the president, the men are not surprised by questions or concerns, unprepared to answer good questions. It will also give the president a sense that the group is in agreement on a proposal that they all had a hand in developing, one they all generally agree is a strong proposal. I wouldn't like to have his questions met with the pregnant silence because no one knows what the answer is or who is supposed to answer it.

I asked them to assume the role of someone who was against them, so that they could look at things from a different perspective. Once we got some of these ideas drafted, I asked them to get all members of the class involved in the presentation by having them volunteer to talk about the things they knew the most about. I'm hoping they remember these things when they become members of a quality circle.

8/5

We reached final agreement on the first four pages of our proposal, then rehashed the anticipated questions and answers. I reminded them that their goal is to try to cover everything, but that they still might be hit with questions they hadn't expected. Each time we meet, we find new questions someone could ask.

The class continues to move fast, oversimplifying things and not looking deeply enough into what they want to do. A case in point is the letter we are composing to introduce our proposal to the president. They were ready to quit after two sentences. It did give me an opportunity to review the communication process with them, how the sender can easily assume that the reader will fill in the right information when gaps are left, and how the sender is so familiar with what he wants his message to say that he/she assumes everyone will see things exactly the way the author sees them. They nodded and went back to the draft of the letter. By the time class ended, they had completed a much more effective document.

The men decided to present their proposal in the next-to-the-last session, then meet in the last session to talk about how things went. They seem to have developed a sense of group ownership, of belonging here, and want to talk about their efforts rather than just leave them after the class is over. I see this as a very positive sign.

8/10

All signed the letter to the president, then we reviewed the anticipated questions and answers. There was considerable discussion about which items would be the most difficult to sell and which would be the easiest. All statements were "assigned" to various individuals to handle when they came up and they seemed to be well prepared for the meeting on Thursday. For the very end of the upcoming session, they prepared some questions they would like answered--very direct and to the point. Mainly they are going to ask for his support in keeping the circles going, even if other supervisors don't endorse them.

The above led to a discussion of the flow chart that the class before theirs had devised. Some felt it was beginning to work, others said that certain people almost had to be forced to use it. The exchange let us know that it was well accepted by some and was being forced on the ones who wanted to disregard it. It is clear that some people are going to be slow to change; they simply aren't in the habit of going through channels, which was one of the major problems identified when we first started classes here. In some cases, people have operated without good communication for many years; they have used the most expedient rather than the most effective ways to get messages across, and it will take time to break those bad habits. The people in this class acknowledged that the crew leaders were the key. They would have to demand to be informed on what was happening and they would have to inform those around them of changes that were made.

I reviewed the communication and the problem-solving processes, then related the "theory" to what we had done in class. This was generally met with underwhelming enthusiasm, but I felt it was important to the future of the projects here. It's what happens after we leave that really matters.

8/12

It was an easy sell. The president came in and opened with, "I like what you guys have done here. You have anticipated the problems well and you have solved some of the difficulties that got in the way when we tried to have quality circles before. The make-up of the groups will allow us to hold the meetings without shutting down the lines, which was probably the biggest stumbling block before." The group was bolstered by his opening praise and did a good job of covering things the way we had planned. Even P., the quietist one in the group, was more vocal than he had been in the regular class meetings.

The president unknowingly helped our presentation by asking most of the questions the men thought he would ask. But he did want to cut the number of circles from three to two. He was concerned about overdoing it and turn-around time on ideas. Too many meetings could put too many things on the table at once, which the men understood. The resulting discussion ended with the elimination of an over-all plant circle and going with a circle for each of the two departments.

The president mentioned that he was not really bothered by providing released time for meetings. He had "committed a number of man-hours to the classes being held now" and was happy with the results, so he was confident the circles could accomplish some important things as well. The potential for return, he said, was well worth that minor risk.

Then he asked when we could get these started (a question they were prepared to ask *him*). They discussed whether or not people should belong to a circle before they had taken our classes, and all agreed that it would be better to use only those people who had been in classes, waiting for others to finish before they served on a circle. This is strong endorsement for what we have done in class.

Thus, the quality circles were reinstated and scheduled. The president mentioned, "I'll have to exert some pressure if I have to, so that these things aren't dropped because of scheduling problems." I was impressed with the president's handling of this group. He came in prepared with questions and ideas for revisions, and then listened when the guys gave their rationale. This made them feel that what they were doing was valued and given serious consideration. He didn't want people serving in the circles until they were prepared, which indicates he wants them to be successful. He seems ready to take some risks and make some changes, even costly ones, and wants to get things started in a timely manner. He was even anxious to get the first circle started before the end of the month. "We've got to have your ideas here, guys. You know a lot of things we don't. You're the ones out there working in it every day."

I am pleased with the accomplishments and progress of this group. I hope they can serve as a core for each of the circles. They have a lot to offer and I often wonder why managers don't use the wisdom of their workers more fully.

After class I took some time to ask the president how he thought the classes were going. "You are doing just what this company desperately needs. I especially like the way you let them decide what they do. You come in, let them get started talking and eventually they hit on what they think needs to be done. I see people talking, joking and laughing together who hardly used to talk at all before. Then, in time, the things that surface are the things that are most important to them; they get to it. I see them really communicating with each other and working on problems that will make the plant work better. I like the way they have even gotten some things started that will help assure that good communication continues here."

When asked about future classes: "It isn't hard to get people to take the classes. They've seen and heard about the results and seem to want to 'step up and take their swings' too." So I asked if we should go on the way we had been going: "Right. I think that if we'd gone in with our own agenda it would have fallen flat. It has to come from them; we have to show them that we want to hear what they have to say. I like the way you have let them speak their minds, and eventually the settle on something that will help them and help the company. That's good. They need to feel free to express their own ideas about what needs to be done here. They are learning to communicate with some genuine honesty here and they need that." I left this session with a good feeling--about the men and what we were doing to help the company.

8/17

I complemented them on their presentation and how well they chose their language when explaining things. They were pleased with the way their suggestions were received and the overall mood was optimistic, to the man. They were excited about getting the circles started and seeing *their* project in action. We had to compose a cover sheet to go with the circle sheets and suggestion forms, then we reviewed the processes the class used. They praised the approach and the ownership they had in the class. Don sat in on this session and took notes [which follow]; these will provide a more complete picture of our closing session.

This was a particularly good group. They worked very hard and stayed on task throughout. They have also shown us that they will be open and honest in a "safe" environment. This may also indicate that the circles will work if they can apply what they learned here about accepting the ideas of others and attacking problems rather than people.

MacMaster, Observation of R. Lessard
8/17/93

The best class I've seen so far--focused, forward-looking, thoughtful. Rich again has done a fine job letting them set the agenda (what they want to work on), then guiding through the process of solving the problems that arise when something is created in an environment hostile to change. One thing I appreciate about Rich's approach is his rapport with the men. He treats them like adults, connects with them as individuals, and plainly enjoys the time they spend in the classroom together. Consequently, the men like coming to class. Specifically, I think of some the nicknames that come out in class: "Stud-Muffin," Tyrone," "Hog," "Redman." By finding out the derivations of these names and using them strategically and humorously in conversation, Rich validates what the men are to each other. He's not, as one student put it, just "burger-flipping."

While Rich has guided the men toward a product that is tangible and work-specific, he has modelled the process of problem-solving that will carry this effort forward if thoughtfully nurtured by management. This has involved considerable concentrated effort on Rich's part, partly in taking down what they've said and putting it in a format they can revise next time, but also in leading them toward thinking about what questions need to be answered in order to carry the process forward.

This is a key, often neglected piece of most problem-solving classes. In this case, the men were putting together a proposal to have quality circles reinstituted. At one time in the not-too-distant past, quality circles were operating and productive at Acme. But with the union entanglements and a petty hang-up over incentives for good ideas, the quality circles were dropped due to lack of commitment. As the men worked through and developed the proposal, Rich guided them toward anticipating the questions others would have and them helped them prepare themselves to respond. I see this as comparable to the emphasis disciples of the process approach to teaching composition place on revision. Anticipate problems, seek out the weak spots. Vision first then revision. All this models the thinking that must take place if these products are to keep going once the WPP leaves.

Another thing I saw that I liked was that Rich had carved out some time at the end to let them process some of the work that they'd done. He'd come prepared with a checklist that chronicled step-by-step their progress toward the goal they'd set on the first day, and it was illuminating to see them respond proudly and favorable to the quality of their group effort. It also was a neat segue into a discussion about how the quality circles could be maintained; they say the same group problem-solving process that they'd used to draft the proposal as the model for managing the quality circles.

Watching them work, I had a much better feeling for the future of the quality circles than I did for the future of the Progress Reports. I took notes on some of the men's final comments about the class.

> Well done.
> We needed something like this.
> That's why the union came in, because of lack of communication. It was a wake-up call.
> It's a lot better than it used to be here.
> More of a team effort.
> When you opened the class and said, "This class is for you," that was great.
> What we said, you wrote on the chart.
> It was better to let things unfold on their own. You did it right as far as I was concerned.
> When they said you from the college I had a vision of this skinny, uptight guy giving us a lecture for two yours, and I said to myself, "Aw no, not this." But you turned out real laid back. You listened to us. I think that was the main thing to me.
> If we're still using the quality circles a year from now, then we'll have made real progress.

August 10, 1993

Dear :

Our Communications 080 class has put together a proposal for reimplementing the quality circles here. We feel the circles will help open up communication between production and management. We have tried to anticipate some of the problems and solutions to them, and we'd like to show you why we think this would be a good idea.

Enclosed you will find some of the reasoning as well as the proposals for our quality circles. Also included are some ideas for Suggestion and Response forms thaw we'd like to discuss with you. In the class meeting on August 12, we'd like you to come in at 10:30 and give your input on our thinking.

Thank you for your time and cooperation in considering our proposal.

Sincerely'

[Group #3]

ANTICIPATED QUESTIONS, CONCERNS & ANSWERS

Ideas to help insure that the circles don't fade out:

1. Show "idea men" some positive results/response to their suggestions.
2. Provide some incentives for suggestions which improve the workplace and/or save the company money, such as:
   - A. Publicity and/or recognition for good ideas.
   - B. Pizza for the best idea of the month
   - C. Cookouts for ideas made by departments
   - D. Dinner out [for two]
   - E. Gift Certificates [where and how much depending upon the suggestion]
   - F. Sports Tickets
   - G. Savings Bonds
   - H. Additional Personal Days
   - I. Night at Holidome [etc.] for two
   - J. Or ________________________________

   The type of incentive and its cost should be determined by management.
3. Show the workers and supervisors that the circles are working seriously and producing good suggestions. The circles should see that only good suggestions move to the next step.
4. Managers should respond to the suggestions before the next monthly meeting. If a suggestion can't be used, "idea men" and circle members need to know why.
5. Once a suggestion is approved, it should be implemented as soon as possible. The circles should be updated on the progress.
6. Incentives should be awarded as soon as the suggestion is approved by management.

Why incentives & what are they all about?

1. These are only suggestions. Some, all, or none of them can be used. We felt you would like to know the kinds of things we think the men would feel good about. The more money an idea saves the company, the greater the reward incentive should be.
2. We feel that suggestions are the key to the success of the circles; without them, the same people are forced to come up with the ideas all the time and they can go into the meetings with no real agenda. This could cause the circles to die out again and we don't want that to happen. The incentives will encourage people to get involved.
3. The quality circles, with the suggestions and the incentives, will promote trust and confidence. There will be better communication and cooperation between all parties which will also improve morale. The

quality circles should make for better production and quality here at the plant.

4. The long-range effects of a suggestion should be the main concern. Something may cost at first, but the money will be returned later in better quality and/or higher production.
6. If the sequence of suggestion-quality circle-management-feedback is followed, it will help build confidence and a team approach to our work here.

Reasons for quality circles:

They have shown good results in the past --

A. sidearm dryer
B. 6-man teams in nickel room
C. tracking and hoist system in nickel
D. vent and fan systems make work easier
E. table/cart systems increased efficiency
F. organized storage area

The circles would lead to more improvements in the workplace.

Group decisions give more slants, more information and a better general overview of problems.

Attitudes and morale will improve when things flow better.

We propose that three main quality circles meet every month for up to one hour to discuss suggestions, problems and ideas.

Zinc Circle

Zinc Department Leader
Tumbler Operator
Inspector
Seniority Racker
A Foreman
Maintenance
Idea Men [those who bring in a suggestion]

Nickel Circle

Nickel Department Leader
Heat Treat Department Leader
Racker
Unracker
A Foreman
Maintenance
Idea Men [those who bring in suggestions]

Overall Plant Circle

A Foreman [alternate]
All Three Department Leaders
Maintenance
Chemical Analysis
Lift Driver
Idea Men [those who bring in suggestions]

Quality Circle Guidline Sheet

Everyone in the quality circles is to have an equal voice in what goes on there.

The use of the "idea man" gives everyone in the plant an opportunity to be a part of a quality circle.

The quality circles will review all suggestions to see if they should go to the next step. All suggestions will be given serious consideration.

The deadline for suggestions will be two days before the circle is to meet. This will give the leader a chance to bring in any people who could help review it.

We suggest that the monthly meetings be held on a Thursday morning [9:00] and last up to one hour, depending upon how much business there is to deal with. Times can be adjusted to suit the people involved--meetings may have to be postponed because of unexpected deadlines but they will never be canceled.

Once the circles have reviewed a suggestion, the chairman, the recorder, the foreman, the maintenance man and the "idea man" will present the idea to the President and other management personnel who are affected by the changes. Others will be informed according to the communication flow chart.

The meeting with management should be scheduled within a week after the suggestion clears the quality circle.

The purpose of the circles is to attack problems, not people.

Incentives will be awarded for approved ideas and suggestions.

Note: *The circles can not deal with contract issues.*

We feel that suggestions are the key to the success of the circles and the future of the company; without them, the same people are forced to come up with the ideas all the time and they can go into the meetings with no real agenda. This could cause the circles to die out again and we don't want that to happen. The incentives will encourage people to get involved.

These are only suggestions. Some, all, or none of them can be used. We thought you would like to know the kinds of things we think the men would feel good about. The more money an idea saves the company, the greater the reward incentive should be.

Some suggested incentives for suggestions which improve the workplace and/or save the company money could be:

A. Publicity and recognition for good ideas.
B. Pizza for the best idea of the month
C. Cookouts for ideas made by departments
D. Dinner out [for two]
E. Gift Certificates [where and how much depending upon the suggestion]
F. Sports Tickets
G. Savings Bonds
H. Additional Personal Days
I. Night at Holidome [etc.] for two
J. Or ________________________________

The type of incentive and its cost should be determined by management.

SUGGESTION FORM

Name________________________ Dept.________ Date__________

Briefly outline your suggestion.

Why do you think this suggestion/change is needed?

Who will be affected by this change?

Do you have a rough idea of the cost of this suggestion? Y N
Will the cost be recovered later on? Y N

Do you have any additional comments?

The Quality Circle's comments and notes should be kept on the back of this sheet.

MANAGEMENT RESPONSE TO SUGGESTION

Dates: received on ____________ reviewed on ____________

1. Is the suggestion clear? Do you need more information?

2. Do you understand the need for this suggestion?

3. Is the idea accepted or rejected? Explain.

4. How long do you think it will take to put this change in place? Explain.

5. Is there any problem with responding to this suggestion before the next monthly circle meeting? Explain.

6. Please add any additional comments you have about this suggestion.

Signature

Journal - Group 4
Students: U, V, W, X, Y and Z

8/19

First day apprehensions were very much with me as I returned to Acme to begin a new class. How much anger would these men need to vent and could I keep the lid on? How many difficult people would be in here? Were there any legitimate new issues to deal with? It almost seemed like the flow chart and the reactivation of the quality circles could do most of what needed to be done in the plant. But, happily, my fears were unfounded.

There is no supervision in this group. My impression is that the class will come up with some good work, but they may have difficulty communicating with management once it is completed. If negativism is allowed to prevail, it could hurt the progress of the group; it appears that there is a general "us vs. them" mentality here. Yet, there is a clear pride in the jobs they do. The workers see that they can do some things better than others; they revel in a good quality rating from their customer corporations; they feel good when they meet a deadline and can put parts out without a hitch. On the one hand they're bitter about not getting more money, yet on the other, they can come up with a limitless list of things that will make the place better - without appreciable costs.

We began by talking about the nature of the class etc. and that they would set the agenda; my main goal was to give them what they wanted/needed and accomplish what they wanted to accomplish. I gave them several options on what the class could be about and they decided to work on specific communication issues presently found in the plant:

attendance problems, leaving departments short
need "floaters" to help our where needed
implement some attendance incentives [bonds, dinner out, 60 day bonus, etc.]
lack of follow-up from management
workers need more input on crew assignments
training program is inadequate
lack of consistency in inspection standards
work schedules need to be posted sooner

There is no shortage of material here. We decided to focus on the attendance problems, to try to identify just what causes this and try to get people here on schedule. They began to brainstorm and I began to write ideas on the flip chart. Actually, I didn't get to all of the introductory material I wanted, but they got started and I wanted to take their lead. This group is not as optimistic as previous ones, so I wanted to go with their interests and provide them with more feedback, sooner.

8/24

The men were in a pretty negative frame of mind today. They seemed to have saved the traditional gripe session for the second class. I didn't sense this much hostility in the first meeting, but perhaps something has happened that has caused them to be more frustrated today. It was a productive session in terms of catharsis, but generally I was struck by the futility and pessimism they expressed. V. said that "they" keep speeding up the lines and there isn't enough help, so they fall behind and get "bitched at" because they can't keep up. This causes friction between them and supervision. I asked if there had been any improvement since the flow chart was developed, and there was general agreement that they had, but V. and U. felt they still had a long way to go.

Once hostilities were somewhat vented, I directed them back to the process of solving the real problems. The first step was identifying the source of the problem and they returned to attendance and the shortage of help. The class became more productive as they struggled with ways to get people to come to work; they also began to concentrate on ways to convince management to hire more people. I began to wonder if they had all the facts. For instance, are they really aware of just how many people are working now as compared to a year or two ago? They seem to feel that there has been a serious net loss of labor in the plant, but when I pressed them to count numbers, they became confused and couldn't agree on how many were here now, let alone how many were employed a year ago. I reminded them that they could be sure the president would have those figures, so they had better do their homework. They began to produce some ways to improve attendance and discussed a "floater system" that one of them had seen in a previous workplace.

8/26

When the group came in I gave them a draft of their ideas from the last session. This group in particular seems to want to stray from the subjects at hand and whine about their woes at Acme. They like to commiserate and comment on the bright hues of green in the grass around them. There is also a rivalry I hadn't seen before--each seems to think he works harder than the other and is more deserving of the recognition that should follow. It is suggested in a "good natured banter" format, but I suspect there is more to it than humor. There doesn't seem to be any serious open hostility between people here, but there is little brotherly love either. They generally see management as the enemy as well as the ward of their happiness.

They are much more connected with the problem-solving work we are doing than with the communication. There are several relatively new employees in here and the troubles they had when they first came on board are fresh in their minds. Today they took the plant's training methods to task, saying that it gets people off to a negative start. They want to find better ways to train new workers.

They worked on the rationale and the details for the "floater" system, exploring what they would do, who they would be, who would select/assign them etc. U. and V. do much of the brain work but Z. comes up with some surprisingly good ideas at times. He tends to be the most negative in the class, deriding everyone he has ever worked with; he also tends to be the most hostile toward any level of supervision. He holds a defeatist philosophy and sees any efforts to make positive changes as an exercise in futility. W. also expresses bitterness, and feeds off Z. Morale is so low here that I find it difficult to keep them centered. They want to birdwalk on experiences and people.

If there is to be any real progress realized from this project, it will be due to two things: 1] management must tap the knowledge of the men and then follow through on good ideas. 2] the men must acknowledge that they cannot put the responsibility for their peace of mind in the hands of others. They must commit to change, in themselves, rather than waiting for management to do everything for them. It will be a tough task and I'm not sure I can pull it off. I'm not even sure I would listen to me if I were working in what I saw on my tour of the plant. But, they just can't seem to pull together and support one another.

8/31

The group was exceptionally quiet today and I had to work hard to draw them out. U. did most of the work, while the rest seemed content to accept first ideas and drafts. Input became more universal when we got started on the anticipated questions and answers. W. seemed to become highly interested in that. Z. still is essentially negative, but now and then his body language indicates he is processing what is being said, then he comes up with something genuinely profound. He is hostile, but he isn't totally closed-minded. They all harbor a strong resentment for the privileges that go with management. They take no small pride in the sweat and grunt work they do, and any who do less don't deserve the money.

I asked them what makes a good listener and a good sender, then related it to their presentation to the president, afterwhich we drafted the question and answer list. They did a nice job with the questions as well as the answers. Z. continues to amaze us with his insight, but he usually punctuates ideas with a laugh, as if he is almost embarrassed by his contribution.

I made a point of asking, "Are you sure this is what you want? Sure, it is good for the company, but will your proposals make your workplace more pleasant and effective [for you] if these things are put in place?" They were satisfied that this was what they wanted to present. They are frustrated with having to cover for people who are gone. They said they were content with what they are doing with their class time, just not optimistic. We discussed which things were most likely to be accepted and what things might cause the others to be rejected [anticipating audience]. I also asked them to define success--did they have to get everything? They agreed that if they got even one or two things changed here they would be happy.

9/2

We took each Q & A sheet and revised/discussed it. When we got to the floater system, it became clear that they hadn't thought this one through yet. For example, when I asked how much the system might cost, it became clear that they were not aware of what they were asking for. The group is still having difficulty looking at things from a perspective other than their own. But as we began to look for the questions the president might ask, they were forced to get beyond their own personal point of view.

For example, when addressing the issue of costs and profits, W. said, "Yea, it might cut into one of his trips to the Bahamas or something." To which U. replied, "Right. I suppose you wouldn't take a trip like that if you could afford it." W., "Well, maybe not there but I'd like to take a nice hunting trip sometime." It was a good sign, looking at what they would do in the president's situation.

9/7

The group was pressed for time today. The president is scheduled to come in and talk to them in the next session and they have to be ready. They don't seem to be going into this with as positive an attitude as the others have. In the past groups' presentations, some were nervous, others were anxious, but most were eager to present their ideas. I don't see that here. U. is ready and predictably focused; Z. was quick to volunteer to bring up certain points; the rest waited for me to "assign" things to them. I had to be more directive than I wanted to be here.

I gave them a "How do you handle conflict" test and asked them to think about how the president would turn out in the test. "Given that, how do you think you should approach him?" I asked. They began to tackle this and agreed that they should avoid accusing or confronting language. They knew that their best approach was an honest but guarded one.

I also suggested that they be equally prepared to compromise since he would have some tough questions for them and they'd have to be prepared with answers. I was not going to take an active role in the presentation. [They'll certainly need to have the skills to communicate with supervision once the class is over.]

Z. seems to have made some real progress here. [Again, the toughest student makes the most progress.] I'm sure his attitudes are too ingrained to change in four weeks, but he is seeing more than one side of an issue now and he's thinking more about his reasons for the stands he takes.

W. is the least changed. He has the reputation of being a good worker, but he carries an extreme dislike for authority. He concerns me as we go into the presentation. His hostility could do more harm than good.

9/7

I arrived early and decided to touch base with K. and see how he felt the previous projects were going. I chose K. because he has a way of seeing the negative side of things first, so if there were problems, I was sure he would feel free to tell me about them. He felt they were working, but not as well as he thought they should. People were still having trouble going through channels, he said, and that was mostly supervision's fault. Then, A. entered and I asked him what he thought. "I think the flow chart is working well. I've already seen where several problems got solved before they got to me, and that's the way it should be." They also reported that the quality circles were up and running, although one of the two got off to a shaky start and G. had to take some initiative to get things back on the right direction. [I was pleased to see that someone was able/willing to do that.] A. also reported that attendance was getting better. "I haven't had to do as many write-ups lately." He is also seeing that the progress reports are getting out and used, particularly with new workers.

All of this was very welcome news. Things are on the move, but I had left each class with the warning: it is much easier to start things than to sustain them. The real test will come several months down the road. We need to keep these things going.

The presentation to the president went fairly well. However, X. said not a word and Z. said little. I had hoped Z. would be a more positive force here but he wasn't. W. did not hurt them; he remained much more positive than he had been in the regular classes. Still the president felt they were approaching many issues that were contract matters and he "had to work under the confines of the contract." He asked many of the questions we had prepared for. He was most interested in the new training program for recent hires. He worked with them on what should be included and how things should be done. He gave every impression that he would try to put this one in place.

When it came to adding "floaters," as expected, he had done his homework. He told them just how many workers they have had in the past and how many were on staff at the present time, and there had been a net loss of one worker. He agreed that there could be some reorganization and some reassignments and that he would work with them on that, but he was up front about not hiring more people. He felt that if we could solve the attendance problems, there would be less stress to keep up with the lines. He worked with them on the incentives for attendance and said he liked the idea of putting some of them in place. He was willing to commit some money to it, saying that he felt it would return to the company later.

He was surprised to learn that the men do not like the long hours they have been working at times. "I was under the impression that the guys liked the overtime." [Perhaps this speaks to the communication gap at Acme. *He* should have been aware of this because *they* should have talked to him about it.] V. said, "At times we do, but at others we'd like more choice and the floaters would give us that. We could use the seniority system." The president's response: "I'd really hate to be sending our best and most experienced workers home first. Shouldn't we send the newer ones home first?" No surprises here. It is clear that the men did not have enough background on this issue and were unprepared to discuss it thoroughly. But it was also good that the president gently took a stand, and while valuing what they had proposed, let them know that he was not able to implement such a proposal. There were just too many logistical problems that had to be worked out and they hadn't done that yet. [Maybe it can be worked out in a quality circle later.]

The session didn't end as well as I like to see them end. We are going to have to do some extensive processing of this meeting next session. It was much more positive than negative, but the men may tend to dwell on the negatives.

9/14

The men were very unfocused today. They seemed to feel their project was over and they hadn't accomplished their objectives. They wanted to spend time lamenting their plight and wanted to wallow in helplessness some more. I reminded them that they should be taking responsibility for their own destiny rather than tossing it into the laps of others, putting the responsibility for their happiness in the hands of another. This they didn't like to hear, but their body language told me they were thinking about it.

We worked on the things to be covered in the training video and who would act as a consultant for the various things covered. They did a good job of spreading things around and were willing [even enthusiastic] to get involved with its production. Each seemed to take pride in what he knew about the operation but was also careful not to look too enthusiastic in front of his peers. I closed the subject by cautioning them that they should not wait for management to "do" this. They had to be willing to follow up on **their** own project.

Next we discussed the options for attendance incentives. They made an effort to come up with some practical, realistic, and attainable incentives for attendance. I premised the discussion with : "What kinds of things would motivate you to come in on the days you don't want to?" The things they decided to propose were:

new boots [they're expensive]
dinner out - for two
free uniform cleaning
group/department cook-outs
a ski weekend
pizza
a day off
savings bonds

Most of the things could be purchased at a discount for advertising purposes, so the company would not be absorbing a great deal of added cost.

We reviewed the problem-solving and the communication processes and then discussed the results of this class as well as the products of the others before them. They all seemed to feel they would like to participate in the quality circles, but I'm not confident that they could all be strong members. This class actually turned out some good ideas [the retraining program, a floater system, attendance incentives] but I'm not sure they have a good grasp of the processes. At the end, V., W. and Z. still hold a highly myopic view of their environment and don't get much beyond themselves. I wish I could have brought them out of some of their bitterness and learned-helplessness. I'm also concerned about their initiative; will they be willing to put forth an effort to develop the projects they have started? At first I want to say we ran out of time, but then, they must learn to do some of these things for themselves. I just wonder about their commitment to change.

September 7, 1993

Dear :

In our Communications 080 class we have discussed ways to improve communication between management and workers here in the plant. We would like you to meet with us on September 9, and 9:30 am to discuss our ideas on improving attendance through positive incentives. These suggestions will save the company money while improving production ratings. We would like to have your opinions on our proposals.

Thank you for your consideration of the enclosed proposals.

Sincerely,

[Group #4]

One of the biggest problems here is attendance; this is particularly bad with new workers. We feel that a major reason for their poor attendance record is that the present system for training new workers is not as effective as it could be. We propose the following additions and changes:

1. The movies should be supplemented with videos of our own plant's zinc line in operation so the new workers could see how this plant operates as well as the applications of the things presented in the movies.

2. They should be allowed to work **with** a "trainer" for at least a week--trainers should get incentives (subs & soda, pizza, etc.) for training new people. When guys are trying to learn a new job, they should go to the trainer for straight answers.
    A. They will rack faster & learn the best ways.
    B. They will avoid frustrations and get started here with a more positive attitude.
    C. They'll learn the parts and terminology better.
    D. They'll understand what they're being asked to do.
    E. They'll be better inspectors with better training.
    F. New workers will learn the overall atmosphere and operation of the plant faster.

3. They should be kept on the zinc line for the first month. This line is easier to learn, and transfers to the nickel line would be easier later. When they are moved to a different department, they should have time to be trained for the new job or department.

4. They should not be put in inspection until they are more familiar with the operations.

5. They should be encouraged to take the lunch breaks at least the first week. They need the break and time away from the lines.

6. Rack carriers etc. should be clearly numbered so new workers don't waste time looking for things. To help new people, charts should also be made to show what racks to use for what parts.

7. If they show they can keep up before the 90 days, they could receive part of their raise early [maybe 10 cents at 45 days, then the other 15 cents after 90, as long as they met the attendance requirement.

We feel that adding "floaters" would also help speed up production at Tawas Plating; they would also help with attendance problems and make it easier to meet deadlines. They would boost morale if workers didn't have to turn out the same production with fewer workers and help assure that there are enough people to cover the jobs.

Why are they needed?
- to speed up general production
- to maintain production lines when people are gone
- there would be fewer gaps in the lines
- they would help keep overtime down
- to cut down on training time
- overall morale would be better if people on the lines didn't feel as rushed
- an occasional break would help morale
- could eliminate overstaffing problems on days when things are slow [they could be sent home]
- there would be fewer absences from overworking and overtime the day before

What would they do?
- fill in on lines when workers are absent
- help out with new employees
- cover for vacations
- cover for lunches and bathroom breaks
- help out when lines get behind
- bring in parts to help lift drivers keep up if needed
- rack corlett
- could help with general shop upkeep

How many are needed?
- Two should be enough, but we should try it and see.

Who would they be?
- only reliable people with good attendance
- must be an experienced employee
- should be able to do any job
- posted - select the best qualified and most experienced
- must want to serve as a floater
- could be a rotating job

Who would assign them?
- crew leaders would request, foremen would assign
- schedules for breaks and lunches could be posted

Incentives for floaters?
- it would give more variety, be more interesting
- reward incentives for taking the floater job
    - money
    - bonds, etc.

We feel that it would boost morale if we could look forward to having November 15th off for deer season.

1. This would serve as a positive incentive for those with good attendance.
   - A. Those who have no write-ups for attendance could have some options for that day:
     - a. Work 10 hours the week before @ straight time
     - b. Work the Saturday before (Nov. 13)
     - c. Take the day off, with no pay, withour penalty
   - B. It hurts morale when production is here and management isn't.
2. Many guys will be using vacation and personal days anyway, and production will be at a minimum.
3. Many other plants in the area shut down that day.
4. If guys just blow off the day, it will cost the plant money.
5. We are not suggesting an additional day off, just a change in work schedule for that week.

Note: Customers could be called to see if there are any rush orders coming in, and we could do them the week before.

Journal - GROUP # 5
Students: AA, BB, CC, DD, EE & FF

9/16

Experience has served to sustain my morale. It would be easy enough to be discouraged by this group, but having been through the "catharsis" of releasing anger in the first session several times before, I can see this session for what it is. It seemed to be the angriest group so far, although the source of the hostility seems to be coming from one individual rather than three, as was the case in the previous class. In general, they tended to demonstrate an open hostility toward all management, with the exception of H. from group two. It was open season on all the others, and it tends to be personal. A sampling of comments might better reveal the general character of this group:

> "They [supervision] love to start trouble and make us fight among ourselves--then they sit back and laugh about it."
> "They want us to go out of here each day with a sore back."
> "All they ever think about is production. They don't care about quality control-it's just employee control and production."

Meanwhile, they sing the praises of H. He is seen as a working man's supervisor but, "The rest of them hate him for it. He's as far up the ladder here as he'll ever get. He'll work with us and the rest of them resent it. He can get out more production here than any of the rest of them, but they don't give him any credit for that."

I smile as I think of the class lists. Has the president saved the creme de la creme for the last--two union stewards are in here, one of which is clearly the angriest man in the plant. The last two classes have been heavy with union advocates. I give him credit: he is trying to overcome some of the difficulties that came with the unionization. Here we are seeing some of the forces he had to contend with. I hope he doesn't expect miracles with this group.

We worked on a list of problems [see sheet] with CC doing most of the talking. In the middle of the session, the president knocked on the door and got some materials from his desk [He doesn't do this as a rule so I'm sure it was legitimate]. I quickly rolled over the flip chart and pretended to be on some very generic communication matters and after he left, I said, "How was that for a good cover?" They were pleased and began opening up at that point. The floodgates were literally opened and the venom was flowing. The president's entrance and my protection of their ideas might have served to enhance my rapport with them [quite by accident, I might add]. They want to trust someone, and each other, and perhaps this helped do it for them. It is clear that management is the enemy to them and they are curious about where I fit in here. I must be especially careful that this group, make sure CC doesn't try to manipulate me or WPP with some hidden agenda.

Still, the general feeling is there is little that can come of the class anyway, since "all the problems stem from management." I gave my speech on the dangers putting the responsibility into the hands of others, hoping they would mull it over before next class. I also asked them to focus on what they wanted to work on here.

9/21

I began today with the "robbery" exercise to see if they could begin to see things from a perspective other than their first impulses. This is always a revealing exercise, but particularly so this time. Splitting the group in half helped us see what happens when CC is out of the circle for a while, with half of them at least. As expected, the group without him functioned much better. There is much to do in this class, and much of it has to do with getting them to broaden their perspectives.

CC had a very hard time with the perspective exercise; he got more wrong than perhaps anyone I have ever given it to. He had a very tough time trying to understand that there were any possible perspectives besides his own, that it was possible he wasn't wrong but it was also possible the others weren't wrong too. He preferred to admonish the paragraph, the questions and me for giving them such a confusing exercise. "I like to make decisions on things rather than straddling the middle." He sees that as the path of wimps and cowards. When asked to explain, his favorite answer was "It's obvious!" When discussing the differences in the ways people see things, he said "People know things about themselves but they still don't change them," and then he paused to digest just what he had said. He may be making some progress here.

DD was the most insightful, one of the best at Acme. He was quick to notice that there were several ways to look at the paragraph and that pat answers wouldn't work here. He helped others in his group see things that way too. In contrast, AA let his own thinking be set aside for the sake of harmony with his other two collaborators, CC and BB. He was one of those rare ones who ended up with a much worse score on the group answers than on his original sheet. BB usually sided with CC and preferred to attack the questions, the author, etc. rather than putting some thought to what was happening there.

I spent some time processing the exercise and what it means to the sender-receiver chain. I want the myth of the one-to-one relationship between what is said and what is heard dispelled. They have got to be more cognizant of audience and less defensive of their first impressions. That may be the goal of our next lesson.

We began to brainstorm an idea about seeking some rest breaks throughout the day. Brainstorming is a concept that seems very foreign to this group. CC in particular wants to evaluate each idea as soon as it comes up rather than getting several on them on the table first. Constantly he had to be reminded that assessment was a phase which came later. As a practical application of audience anticipation, I focused them on who the president would view the proposal, and the others quickly saw that such a strategy could be effective. Then, as we ended the class, CC said, "We should have had this class a long time ago." A big step. He is beginning to see that the most effective communication doesn't come about on instinct or impulse.

9/28

The class was very productive. I began with a general overview of what makes a good sender and what makes for a good receiver. The group was very involved, although CC was untypically quiet. They put some thought into it, and EE mentioned that "We just want to be treated the way they would want to be treated." That was hammered home with some specifics and details as to what was meant by respect, audience, positive feedback, etc. But the real clincher was when I introduced them to the idea that when messages are sent, we must consider who is receiving them and what they know, what they don't know and what they will need to have us tell them. As we got into this, they began to separate their projected audience, the president, the person, from his role as the receiver. They actually began to detach themselves from the emotional fussing and blaming and begin to think about the background the man would need in order to understand what they were trying to tell him. They worked hard on this, trying to anticipate his questions and their best answers.

After class, CC hesitated, delayed his exit, and in general made a gesture to have me ask him to stay. I said. "You were quiet today. Is something wrong that I can help you with?" This provided his opening. He wanted a copy of the sender and receiver notes I had on the sheets because he was "having a major communication problem with someone." It was quite clear he wanted to give the person the information on how to be a good receiver rather than taking a good look at his own "sending skills," but at least he saw some value in what we were talking about. He began to talk about his problem, omitting most of the detail, and I tried to get him to think of his own roles as sender and receiver. He was very interested, even willing to accept some responsibility for the breakdown. But he felt "she" wasn't listening at all and wasn't talking to him much either. He wanted to "fix" things asap. I cautioned him about that, and suggested he hone his listening skills, let her talk and let her know she was being heard. "Let her rant and rave, if it will help her get some things out. But you have to listen to her and tell her what you are hearing." I told him I could get him a sheet on Thursday but his reaction was, "That may be too late." He was clearly upset but at least he was willing to work on a solution. This was probably a difficult step for this man, admitting he had a problem and asking for help. It would be a good thing if it would work out for him.

9/30

CC was less subdued today but we didn't get a chance to talk about his communication problem. Immediately after class he had to meet with the union people about the grievances over two men who were fired for fighting. They are trying to reclaim their jobs, despite the fact that they both had little good to say about the place when they were in class. Rumor has it the union is going to back one but not the other. From management's perspective, they see it as a personal thing, a closeness between the favored man and CC, while the other has no real ally in the plant. But another way of looking at it would be that the union is making a distinction between a man who has been involved in five altercations in his first year of work while the other was involved with his first one in his seven years there. Indeed, there is more than one way of looking at this one.

The men were very focused on their proposal. I talked about some general communication issues, related them to communication in general as well as to our specific situation with the break system. They were polite and attentive, but I read an urgency to get at the task at hand, which was to devise a system that would work. I have some concerns about whether we will get into some contract problems with this one, but CC said, "We can do anything we want to improve conditions here and the union will not have a problem with it." I had asked them to do some thinking about this between classes, and it was evident some, DD and AA in particular, had. BB and CC pitched in as well, EE provided more input than usual, while FF assumed his comfortable place in the background. I drew out his views on several occasions, but he isn't confident about volunteering ideas in this group.

Despite efforts to temper their hostile mentality, they couldn't resist bashing their supervisors and fellow workers alike. I gave them the "Grass is greener--" and mentioned that the strongest thing they have going for each other here is each other and they had better learn to work together--with everyone--if they want to improve their environment. They just need to give others the same respect they'd like to have and things would get better [exactly what they said they wanted], but there is so much anger, they feel so downtrodden that they lash out at others in feeble, misguided efforts to bolster their own self-esteem. Very basic behavior patterns, but I'm at a loss as to how to break them down in the time allowed. We're looking at lifestyles here, and to think they are going to change in four weeks is unrealistic, at best. Maybe we can plant some seeds here that will germinate and grow; connections will be made and turn things around at some opportune time later.

I talked to the president briefly after the class, and naturally the conversation turned to the fight and the pending grievances. He is mostly worried about company liability in the event someone should get hurt being jostled into one of the machines or, worse yet one of the tanks. He also sees the need to show management's strength and control, to show that fighting will not be tolerated. There seems to exist a management mentality [less in him than in the others I talk to at AP] that wants to treat workers as children. Then comes the all-out battle between two workers and no one really wants to look at the histories, the dynamics which led to it. They cure the symptom by firing the workers but the real illness is probably the way workers feel about themselves.

Supervision is beginning to talk to the men and that is a good sign. If they can just hold up their end now, and prove to the men that this dialogue is good, that it will work, before they are confronted with too much negativism and conflict, then maybe the work that has begun here can continue. The president hates conflict, doesn't want to be the "bad guy" as he so often puts it. The men have a real opportunity to impact their environment here if they can let go of the past and work together. He seems ready to make some changes.

10/5

AA is on vacation this week. CC arrived saying, "I have something to say. We can't do this. The union says that we have to deal with it in the contract." This confirmed my early suspicions, but I'm not really bothered by the fact that they can't present this particular proposal. The process they went through was much more important than the product, and they have some good material for the break system when they get to it in negotiations. The men took it well, after the initial shock wore off, and began to review another issue from their original idea list. This temporary setback may have been a good thing in reality, a way of testing their ability to apply the processes we used to get to where we were with the first proposal. They showed their grasp of this by attacking the next issue in a highly efficient and methodical way. There was no wasted motion here and they got more done in today's two hours than any group I have worked with so far. They pulled some of their rationale from the previous proposal and plugged it into their concerns about personnel shortages. They quickly jogged memories to add any things that were brought out in casual discussions in previous sessions, which could apply to this problem. All things considered, they have put a good proposal together, although it isn't so very different from the one they had to drop for the time being.

EE was especially vocal today. He contributed more in this session than he had in all of the previous ones. FF was still reluctant to volunteer, but he was more expressive when drawn out. CC and DD still carried the bulk of the load, while BB came up with some distracting bird walks early, got negative feedback, and withdrew into silence. It appears that at times he would rather find fault with what others say than come up with ideas on his own. He has a hard time coming up with suggestions, but he does evaluate the suggestions of others once they are on the table. Only problem is, his timing isn't good, nor is his approach.

As we finalized some of the things we were putting together, I had to direct them toward composing their letter to the president. In this exercise, FF came up with some of the best wording. DD was very good as well, and CC--although his ideas were good, his language was not. He seems much better, but he is still not good at looking beyond himself. DD was especially good at searching for the language that would best work with the president. They keep saying, "He likes papers in front of him, with outlines and charts etc." Then they tried to put things to him in a way that would make him most receptive.

Follow-up: The men in class said that the attendance incentive sheet the previous class devised is posted. There was no sweeping reaction at this point, but it is up and running. He has built in a 90-day incentive, which is plenty long for these men, but it is a start.

After class, I had a chance to chat briefly with D from the pilot group. I asked him about the follow-through on the other projects and he was very positive about the changes the groups have made. "Just the other day, someone came to me with a question and I sent them through channels. I told them that if they don't get an answer, come back to me. It's working and I like the flow chart; we're not using it every day because it isn't needed every day, but it is being used a lot. Just about all of us are using it and sending those who don't back through channels. It'll take time but it has already improved things here."

D on the "Progress Reports": "They're out. Not a lot of them because we're giving them to people on their 'anniversary' but they are being used. I've seen several of them already." Also on that note, the present group hopes to use them in the evaluation process for new workers.

10/7

To start, I gave the men the "test" on how they handle conflicts. They balked at first, especially EE, "I hate to read." Once they began to discuss it, they saw the connection between the approaches people use and which ones would be most effective with a particular audience. This group seemed to be better with this exercise than some of the others, but they did the exercise later in the class. I held off because I felt they would do better if they had more time to work on the communication basics we covered. They came up with some good examples of when it would be best to use a particular approach; they were also quick to see that they, at times, are called upon to use all of the five approaches, depending upon the situation.

Three of the guys wanted to keep their tests and the explanation sheets. CC wanted a new one; he wanted to give the test to his wife. It seems that she withdraws too much and doesn't tell him what's on her mind. Small wonder why she reacts this way--he came out shark all the way.

Once this was done, I asked them which approach they felt the president would be using on Tuesday. They felt he would be the owl or fox--all but CC. He saw the man as a shark and his "I know this is true because I've had a lot of dealings with him," approach silenced the others, but failed to sway them much. As the discussion went on, CC even bent a little and conceded that the president would probably use the owl or fox approach "in our meeting." This is one of the first times he has listened well to the other members of the group. We miss AA. AA tempers CC a bit, but most feel that they have to withdraw into their shells and let him rant and rave. Today's CC-isms: "He's going to protect himself. He isn't about to give us everything we want. He doesn't consider us very smart. etc." CC has come a long way in this class, farther than any student at Acme so far, but no one could be pleased with where he is at this point. He had so far to go that for all his progress, he is still a very abrasive and egocentric member of a group. Our only real hope is that the seeds planted here will gradually germinate in his psyche and he will be able to catch himself reverting to his more debilitating ways. Optimistic, but that is the best hope for this man as he exits the class.

We spent the remainder of the class trying to solidify our proposal. They were satisfied with the letter and the outline so far, but that isn't necessarily because it was a great proposal. CC in particular (and he usually plays the key role) is too quickly satisfied with surface thinking. DD, the other major contributor, is a little more probing, but he too doesn't like to "belabor" a point.

Then we worked more on anticipated questions and answers. This group didn't really want to write things down, or "assign" topics to be sure all was covered and everyone was involved. They preferred a more spontaneous approach, which unsettles me. First of all, I think too many good things can be too easily forgotten; secondly, if this groups relies on spontaneous responses, I'm afraid that they will let CC do most of the talking. I'm not sure he finds the best approach and I'm one to feel all of them to contribute to the presentation. They did some good thinking and they were much better and quicker to see how supervision would see things as well as how to respond to this audience. I think they have learned some things here. They also might have a very interesting session on Tuesday.

10/12

I arrived a bit early and XX, the real force behind the plant (and the owner) introduced himself to me. He was very supportive of the president, the project, Don, me, the men, etc. His praise was glowing, to say the least. His sincerity could be questioned, in light of the many things I have heard from the men, but he seems to be willing to give the new management style [and the project] an honest trial. I'm not sure the men's assessments of other supervisors I have met here have been totally accurate so far, and this leads me to believe that XX, at the very least, wants to believe in the success of the project. Some quotes:

> "I have been pleased with the projects the men have come up with."
>
> "The men have primarily done things that will help the company, but not necessarily the man as an individual." [I think this is significant, coming from him; the things I have heard led me to believe he was one who was fearful of relinquishing power to the men, feeling their vested interests would lead them to look for things that would be good for them, but not necessarily good for the company.]
>
> "I've seen a difference in the way people are communicating around here."

The class came in, sans CC who was out with a bad back, and we began to work on the anticipated questions, assigning specific areas to specific people who would be most informed. DD was quick to volunteer, as was EE; AA too took his turns, but since he was on vacation last week, he was less inclined to get involved. BB and FF were the last to volunteer, although they were not reluctant to become involved. I impressed upon them that they all should take part in the presentation, show a united front. The goal is to get each member of the group more comfortable discussing with management what's on his mind . The classes serve as an "ice breaker" in that respect. I have felt that the president is good at listening to them and talking honestly with them, and before the session is over they relax and open discussion is taking place.

CC's absence was probably a good thing. The others were allowed more voice in the presentation, and all of them handled themselves well. The president helps make them feel at ease and asks them questions which call for open and honest answers, yet they are "safe" questions:

"BB, when you ended your 90-day trial, what types of evaluations were used?"
BB: "Well, none. I knew I made it because I got the 25 cent raise and my insurance came through, but I didn't sit down with anyone and talk about my job or anything." [This was regarding the proposal for more evaluation and clearer understanding of expectations for new employees.]
"FF, did you have a sit-down with supervision when you were through with your probationary period?"
FF: "No. I didn't hear from anybody at 90 days or since." [This is important, because the president sees the need for more communication, and positive feedback, between supervision and workers. He was under the impression that this was being done and he pursued this because he was surprised by the fact that it wasn't.]

"DD, when the workers are shifted around, who decides who goes where and when?"
DD: "Usually the crew leader or the foreman; but sometimes when we know a good worker is available, we ask for him." [re: the shifting workforce on the floor]

"EE, were you tested when you came in here."
EE: "Remember, I came in here twice, and the first time I had to answer some questions but there was no dexterity test or anything. The second time they just hired me."
DD: "I came in through "Manpower" and they gave me different tests to see what we could do, then, I

think they placed us on the basis of what areas we were good at."

AA: "Yea, some of those tests are a bitch. They don't have to be that tough here. We just need to know if a guy can do the job. Once he's here a week, we can tell is he wants to do it or not."

DD: "Right, but some of these guys can put on a good act for 90 days so they'll be pretty good for a week too. But at least we know they're trying, which is all we want anyway."

The entire group continued to brainstorm and take notes. The president was good at drawing out each member and getting views. For some it was their first time to see this aspect of his leadership.

The proposal for additional workers didn't receive the acceptance the other did. He agreed with all points on it but two: 1] he stated that there was only one less worker than they had a year ago; 2] he felt that line speeds and production demands were adjusted to suit the manpower on the floor at the time. The men didn't dispute either, which should have been done in point 2. If they felt the line speeds were not adjusted, they should have said so. It was early in the session and perhaps the rapport hadn't been established yet, but they said they felt strongly about this in class and let it by too cheaply here.

Together we worked out the logistics of the three phases of the early evaluations, then he accepted the proposal as such. It is a good proposal for three reasons: 1] it insures feedback and communication between new workers and supervision; 2] new workers will have a better idea of what is expected of them; and 3] production and management are working together to promote a better workforce.

All in all, the men seemed to be mindful of what we were doing in class and how to make and present a proposal. BB occasionally "bird walked" but that has been his pattern. AA was not as vocal as I expected while DD and EE spoke out frequently. They remained in control and chose their language carefully. I was content with their presentation.

Afterward I spent some time with the president, discussing the project and the last group's ideas. He seems to be a bit uneasy about our leaving the plant now and carrying things on himself without our direction. He said, "Of course, we can't justify the salary, but it would be nice to have someone on staff to keep these things going now." I didn't mention that the person could be himself, but I hinted to the effect by pointing out that the men are talking to him now and they are coming to him with sensitive issues in a logical and reasonable manner. I reminded him that he is much better at talking to the men than he realizes. But he dislikes conflict and has often lamented his role as "the bad guy" in conflicting situations. He has the power to turn things around here, but I'm not sure he has the confidence in his ability to negotiate with the men. The unionization battles have left their casualties.

10/14

Last class of the last group. Mixed feelings--it is good to have the closure on this project, but the project is hardly closed. There is still much to be done here, but in general, I don't find these students particularly "accepting" people. The overall atmosphere is still threatening. Problems funnel down, a process which ends up affecting many people. There is still too much blaming and defending, an unhealthy cannibalistic atmosphere requiring good offensive skills in order to survive. The men practice their offense on each other, and they have no tolerance for people with a problem. They are stressed and rushed to the point where the man next to them had better be equally stressed and as rushed or he is attacked for it. "No one in the plant works as hard as I do; management is the enemy; I deserve twice what I'm making, etc." are the prevailing philosophies. Few are the men who don't despise the work there, and themselves for working there.

CC was still out with a bad back. We reviewed the proposal and what they won/lost. They generally felt that they had gained a great deal, almost all of the second proposal, and that they had made some good points on the first. The president had agreed with all of their reasoning, but he questioned the line speed. He was also made aware of some things that supervision was or was not doing and the students felt these were things he needed to know. They felt good about what they accomplished, although they were not sure what would happen with the manpower issue. I reminded them that they heard him say "Yes" and they heard him say "No" and they heard him make no commitment. That told them that he was being honest, making no promises he couldn't keep and that he would work on things that he agreed needed changing, but he couldn't guarantee that he could change them. They agreed, and felt he was very cooperative; he collaborated with them, asked them questions and wrote down their answers. They honestly felt he valued their responses.

We then reviewed the processes we used to get there and I suggested they keep the sheets for future references in quality circles. As we were going through the review, many relevant issues came up, and I kept telling them to get them in the suggestion box and put the quality circles to work. "The circles are your best means of bringing new things to management's attention," I kept reminding them. AA in particular had some good problems and suggestions. They must keep the projects alive here.

At the end of the class, we finalized their proposals and I showed them that follow-up was necessary. "Who is going to do what and when?" They tend to "let George do it" when it comes to this phase and they have to be more specific on that. So I had them work out how to follow up on their evaluation of new workers. DD and EE are going to check that one, and AA and FF are supposed to check on the 90-day workers who are about to be confirmed. Hopefully this impressed upon them the need to get things done by knowing just who is going to do them.

The evaluation forms were filled out. Though the results were positive, I was disappointed that, despite my none too subtle urging, only two added any comments on the open-ended questions at the end.

October 7, 1993

Dear :

Due to the history of losses of employees at this company, past and present, we would like to address the lack of manpower here. We feel this creates unnecessary stress and a lack of teamwork between workers, as well as between supervision and workers. We also think that as we add employees we could help devise a better system for hiring new employees here. In addition to what we now have, we have come up with some ideas that would benefit us all; these would improve teamwork and increase productivity and quality.

Please look our ideas over and meet with us on Tuesday, October 12, at 9:30 am to discuss them. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

[Group #5]

PROPOSAL FOR A BREAK SYSTEM

Questions and Answers:

1. *Why is it important that the men have breaks?*

It [could/will] increase production.
- it would boost morale and men would work harder
- more full racks instead of partial racks
- fewer gaps in the lines
- present system is inefficient and unequal
- it would give us a break time we could count on

It would result in better quality
- we're proud of quality now, but it could be better
- inspectors would have "rested eyes"
  - repetition causes a blank stare
- men would have rested bodies and be faster
  - bending is hard on backs
  - repetition causes muscle fatigue
- with full racks, the lines and tanks would work the way they are supposed to work

It would make for a safer workplace.
- need a restroom break
- remember, we had long hours & lots of accidents
- the little safety incidents are not recorded

It would promote better teamwork in the plant
- guys would pull together to make it work
- guys would get to know others on break with them

There would be less tension between workers [fights]

We are aware that the half hour lunch breaks aren't realistic. If the lines are shut down for half an hour it could add up to nearly an hour's loss of production by the time we are up and running again. The power costs and extended overhead would be bad for the company. You don't want to extend the day and neither do the workers. The break system could provide a good alternative.

2. *Don't you already get a break when we change parts?*

Not really; we're changing parts, lines, racks, gons; removing rejects; taking reject barrels out and bringing in new parts; doing paperwork; etc.
Too rare; some days we don't get any this way
Some can get a break at this time, others don't
This doesn't give us a chance to get off our feet and really relax for a while.

3. *How can you be sure some workers won't abuse break time?*

   Peer pressure; we want this to work.
   Supervision will have to help take care of abuses, but it may be easier to keep men on task if they have a break time they can count on.

4. *This is a contract issue, isn't it?*

   We would rather not make this a contract issue. We can be more flexible this way. We would rather work together with you on this problem--you want our input and we want yours.
   Really, everything we do in these classes or in the quality circles could become a contract issue. We don't feel problems can or should be solved in a contract.
   As long as we are working for the betterment of the workers and the company, the union will have no problem with what we do.

Questions yet to answer:

1. The men didn't like the lunch break, why do you think this will work?
2. Are you saying that there would be no extra time added to the day for breaks? [7.6 hr. days?]
3. Would it be better to have a break after two hours, then a four hour stretch? Or would it be better to have the breaks three hours apart?

Questions on the consistent starting schedules:

1. We don't know what our orders will be; how can we set up a firm schedule when we are at the "beck and call" of our customers?
2. It would be too complicated. How would we do it?
3. Schedule changes are rare? It isn't that big a problem, is it?
4. I don't make up the schedule. You'll have to take this up with Jack.

PROPOSED BREAK SYSTEM

We believe we can get breaks in without losing production time, and increase output at the end of the day.

Zinc Line:

Rackers break first
When gap comes around, inspectors take theirs
Lift operators should be easy to relieve for 10 min.
The crew leader could be relieved by a foreman

Heat Treat:
Since they are not part of a moving line, they should be able to fit in a break at a fairly regular time.

Maintenance:
They also should be able to find a time when they can relieve each other. They may not be able to schedule a regular time each day, but they should be able to work something out.

Waste Treatment:
They also can arrange to relieve each other.

Nickel:

Worker	Relieved by
Rackers	
Dryers	
Handlers (2)	
Crew Leaders	Relieve each other, foreman
Chem. Analysts	

We are using our two "floaters" ( ) to keep the lines moving efficiently. They can fit their breaks in as others get back.

PROBLEMS WITH THE SHORTAGE OF MANPOWER

I. The nature of the problem:

  A. We recently have lost about 20% of our work force.
    1. People aren't being replaced as fast as we lose them.
    2. This is especially a problem when workers are absent.
    3. We are short at least three people on rack lines at the present time.
    4. People are being pulled from one line to the other--inconsistency.
    5. We are being asked to meet the same production with fewer people.

  B. We are losing productivity.
    1. Tanks will work more efficiently if they are filled. The chem. analysts have a hard time controlling the tanks with inconsistent loads.
    2. Line speeds aren't adjusted to the number of workers we now have.
    3. Departments get shorted when men are pulled off one line to fill in at another.
    4. When guys are pulled to a job they aren't familiar with, they aren't as efficient or as fast.
    5. The zinc line is especially affected by this.

II. The reasons why we think more workers are needed.

  A. It would improve morale.
  B. There would be much less stress on workers.
  C. There is a safety factor when men are rushed and/or tired.
  D. More workers would promote better teamwork in the plant. There is too much tension now, and too many fights.
  E. There would be less friction between supervision and production if we weren't so rushed. Supervision is pressed to meet production and the men are pressed to keep up.
  F. The more experienced workers could be kept on inspection, which is not the case now.
  G. When last minute orders come in, the manpower shortage makes things especially difficult.

ADDED SUGGESTIONS FOR HIRING NEW WORKERS

I. Suggestions for the hiring process

- A. Involve foremen in the interview and hiring process.
- B. Involve crew leaders in the interview and selection process.
- C. Use the example of "Manpower" and add a dexterity test to see where the new worker would best fit in here:
  1. test eye/hand coordination
  2. check for speed and accuracy
  3. test them on an actual rack here
  4. test ability to tell colors
  5. check ability to tell shapes & sizes quickly
- D. Maybe a written test to determine--
  1. their ability to do the paperwork here
  2. their ability to get along with others

[We are not saying that people who don't do well in certain areas should not be hired; we want to be sure that people are put on a job that best suits them. When a new man can't pull his weight, the rest have to work much harder to make up for it.]

II. Improving the evaluation process.

- A. Use the "Progress Reports" to review the new worker after the first week.
  1. To clarify what is expected of him.
  2. To weed out those who don't care & aren't trying.
- B. If their work shows promise, use the "Progress Reports" to review workers again at 30 days.
  1. They need the feedback.
  2. We need the input.
- C. If they show they can do the job, stay with the present system of the final evaluation at 90 days.
- D. This gives 3 reports on a worker, with input from other workers and supervisors, at the end of the 90 days.

[The 90-day trial period is too long. We feel that people show if they can (or are willing to) do the job sooner than that.]

ANTICIPATED QUESTIONS & RESPONSES

Openers: The bottom line is that we're short of employees here and we are trying to help you put the right people on.

What do you see as the main problem?

- Men are being pulled from one line to another, which hurts production and efficiency in every department.
- For example, last Monday's problem carried over into Tuesday, which created problems into Wednesday.
- The zinc line is especially affected by the shifts. Zinc has come a long way since you got here and we don't want to see that turned around.
- We take pride in our production and quality control, but we also can't do our best when we are short of manpower.

What do you think we'll gain by adding employees?

- You may not be aware of the stress level back there. There is pressure to keep the lines running at a set pace and it feels like we're rushed all day long.
- We'll have more experienced workers on the job.
- Absenteeism would be less of a problem.
- There will be better quality control and less waste.
- We could take on more contracts.
- It would make scheduling easier and more consistent. We'd like more consistency on our hours and in our daily jobs, and we think supervision would too.

Where do you suggest we look for employees?

- You could take advantage of the state and federal programs.
- Once the program runs out at the end of the year, you have an experienced employee we can count on.

Our contracts have been down.

- We realize that there are always slack periods and peak times, but the lines are about four people short right now.
- Could we handle more contracts than we are accepting now? Are we turning work away?
- For example, Flint just doubled their production.

I thought the men liked the overtime.

- We do, but there comes a point.
- The guys don't like all the Saturday work.
- New employees won't affect it a lot because overtime is given on seniority. Those who want it will still be given a chance to work.

Why the new hiring and evaluation system?

- We think the men who work with these guys know their work habits best.
- We don't like to have bad employees here either; it makes it harder on the rest of us to keep up.

- Why is attendance so bad?
    - People don't care enough. This can be improved by:
        - Positive feedback [examples]
        - Incentives
            - paid days off [other plants do this]
            - meals out
            - bonds
        - Better organization
            - consistency in scheduling [explain/give examples]
            - fewer last-minute changes
    - Those who do show up have to work too hard to cover for those absent - still expect the same production
- The Video - Who would make it?
    - The president would make it; crew leaders would help; it would be good to have input from a newer worker to show what he needed the most help with.
- What would be shown in the video?
    - Safety equipment and showers
    - Safety switches
    - What crashes look like
    - What different parts look like
    - What different racks look like
    - Examples of bad parts
    - Proper equipment for cleaning tanks
    - Where the rectifiers and electrocleaners are
    - How racks go on and off the machines
    - What to look for as things are run
- Why do you want new workers with one trainer?
    - So they're not getting 4 or 5 different answers
    - So they can get comfortable asking questions
    - To avoid hazing
    - The trainer can tell if a guy is going to be a good worker or not.
- What about the incentives?
    - There are starting points - we'd like to consider other things as well.
    - The contract states that things can be improved
- Why retraining for new jobs here?
    - Many of the same reasons as above
    - Maybe only part time in the new area at first so he can have time to get used to it.
- What are the problems with new workers on inspection?
    - They don't really know what they're looking for?
    - They need closer contact with QC
    - There are sometimes inconsistent standards [depends on deadlines, day of week, no. of people working that day]
- What is the problem with the carts?
    - There is nothing to tell what is on the carriers
    - Labels would save time & energy of new workers
    - Who would label them?
- What about the cost of the 45 day incentive for keeping up?
    - The trainer can tell if he's keeping up
    - This would be a good time for the new worker to use the job progress report

Evaluating the Project

Throughout the project we relied on learner feedback to keep us "directed." Taking the advice of Anderson (1992) we made an effort to use a variety of methods, including oral and written, individual and group, formal and informal assessments. In particular, we soon learned that literacy needs interfered with their written responses; they just would not spend the time to discuss things in writing. So, we approached students and ex-students before class, in class and after class. The personal contacts helped us to clarify the meanings of their responses. We tried to focus on the things that were within out power to chance, since a "climate for [meaningful] feedback cannot be sustained if nothing happens in response." (Anderson, 1992, p. 164)

The feedback also served as a vehicle of reflection for students to process what they were doing and learning. It also served to reinforce some of the concepts we were trying to address. As they began to explain their thoughts to others in the class, they were able to negotiate meanings and discover what they were learning and retaining.

The fact that this company was willing to release students for two hours [with pay] during the workday implied that things would be different this time. There had been training sessions and workshops before, but our classes represented a stronger and longer commitment than had been made before. Company commitment to and support for their education and learning served to motivate workers to achieve greater gains than would have otherwise been the case. Still, there was some skepticism that their efforts would produce any lasting changes. In the past, changes and gains enjoyed a rather short life. As one worker stated, "We have had all kinds of good ideas and programs around here but they are always just dropped. Nobody follows through on them."

Classes were held between 9:00 and 11:00 in the morning, but many of the workers had already been on the job for as long as six hours. Some students were tired, most welcomed a the chance to "sit down for a while." The fast pace of their work was evidenced in their faces as they entered the room. "For learners to exercise control in any meaningful sense, they must not be so buried under the demands of their daily work that they have neither the time, energy nor the inclination left over to engage in shaping and making decisions about their own development." (Brookfield, 1993, p. 237) If energies are so consumed with daily existence, then it is difficult to focus on the future. The cynicism demonstrated by many of our students is easy enough to understand. Their work is hard and unrewarding; they often told us, "We've been down this road before and nothin' changes for long." Yet they continued to work diligently on the problems and **their** projects, hoping that they could in some way impact their environment. They took ownership for their projects; the issues focused on their problems and they saw an opportunity to change things. They felt some empowerment and seemed to want to prove, at least to themselves, that they were worthy of the challenge. Still, there was an air of futility as they prepared to present their proposals to the president. They often said, "Oh, he'll nod and agree, but it won't last."

I felt it was important that the students assume ownership for the "projects" they undertook. This meant taking the risk of allowing them to approach some subjects that would be sensitive, some subjects that I was sure wouldn't come to fruition, and some that had been covered in previous classes. But the projects were **theirs**, from conception to completion, for this was the only way they could model the kinds of behaviors that would help them work together in the future. WPP classes can easily get mired in company politics and I tried to avoid that as much as possible. However, in a problem-solving class which addresses company-specific problems, there is no way to avoid politics entirely. Often the men wanted to use me to "do" something "for" them, and I didn't allow that to happen. At the end of each class, each group presented its proposal[s] to the president and I assumed a minor role, believing that what they learned *how to do* was more important than what they *did* at the end of the session.

- Alpena Community College
Education Survey Form

The following questions are designed to help us assess the impact of this set of problem-solving classes. Please do not sign your name on this form.

On a scale of 1-5, with 5 the highest, please rate your response to the following questions.

(1)	How do you rate the quality of communication in the plant prior to the beginning of classes?	1	2	3	4	5
(2)	How do you rate the quality of communication in the plant now?	1	2	3	4	5
(3)	If you believe there has been improvement, how much of that improvement do you attribute to these classes?	1	2	3	4	5
(4)	How valuable will the communications flow chart, the employee appraisal form, and the quality circle teams be if instituted?	1	2	3	4	5
(5)	How likely is it that the communications flow chart, the employee appraisal form, and the quality circles will remain in place and productive?	1	2	3	4	5
(6)	How likely is it that you will be able to apply the problem-solving process on your own to solve new problems when classes are finished?	1	2	3	4	5
(7)	Rate the overall impact of these classes on your job satisfaction.	1	2	3	4	5
(8)	Rate the overall impact of these classes on company productivity.	1	2	3	4	5

(9) Rate the overall impact this course had on your communication and/or problem-solving skills outside the workplace. 1 2 3 4 5

(10) Has this class made you feel more confident in your learning abilities? 1 2 3 4 5

(11) To what extent do you now feel you can be a productive and contributing member of a group? 1 2 3 4 5

(12) To what extent do you feel the members of this group helped each other and shared information? 1 2 3 4 5

(13) Was the information covered in this of real, practical value to you? 1 2 3 4 5

(14) How much do you feel you had a voice in what took place in this class? 1 2 3 4 5

(15) How well organized and helpful did you find the instructor? 1 2 3 4 5

(16) How comfortable were you with asking questions of the instructor? 1 2 3 4 5

Other comments and suggestions:

Group #1

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
1	3				1											
2	3	2			2			1								
3		3	2		1	2	1	3	1		1	1		1		
4		1	1	2	1	3	4	2	2	3	3	4	1	1		2
5			3	4	1	1	1		3	3	2	1	5	4	6	4

Group #2

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
1	3								1							
2	4				3											
3		3			3	2	1	3	2	1		1				
4		4	4	2	1	4	5	3	3	5	3	1	4	3		
5			3	5		1	1	1	1	1	4	5	3	4	7	7

Group #3

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
1	1															
2	2	1														
3	1	4	1			1		1	2	1	1					
4	1		2	1	3	2	4	4	2	2	3	1	1	2	1	
5			2	4	2	2	1		1	2	1	4	4	3	4	5

Group #4

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	.
1	4																
2	2	3			1	1			1								.
3		3	3	3	5	1	4	1	2	1	1		1	1	1	1	.
4			1	3		4	1	3	2	5	4		1	2		1	.
5			2				1	2	1		1	6	4	3	5	4	.

Group #5

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	.
1	2						1	1									
2	3	1	1											1			.
3		3	2	1	5	1	1	2	3	3		1				1	.
4		1		3		4	3	2	2	2	3	2	3	2	2	1	.
5			2	1							2	2	2	2	3	3	.

TOTAL GROUPS

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	.
1	13				1		1	1	1								
2	14	7	1		6	1		1	1					1			.
3	1	16	8	4	14	7	7	10	10	6	3	3	1	2	1	2	.
4	1	6	8	11	5	17	17	14	11	17	16	8	10	10	3	4	.
5			12	14	3	4	4	3	6	6	10	18	18	16	25	23	.

1. **In what way has the course helped you on-the-job?**

Understanding how to explain things.

Open my mind to others on how they are trying to get across.

It helped me understand the way the other guys feel about their jobs. What's on their minds. And I heard the good ideas they have about their job.

How to deal with other people without getting mad.

I have put an extra effort into being a better listener

The class has helped in the way I have been communicating with my fellow workers.

To be a better listener. Working closer with other people.

Opened my eyes to a better way of seeing things! Better trust, better control of things that are going on in my area!

I learned to listen because everyone has an opinion and it may help what you're doing (2 heads is better than one)

It helped me to have a more open mind on other people's ideas and to try to work more as a team.

Learned how to communicate better.

It will help reduce wasted time, improve production, help relationship between each other.

To get everyone to work together.

The course has improved cooperation between the members of the group. Attitudes have become more positive.

2. **In what way has the course helped you on a personal basis?**

I personally am trying to use this in a different job that I am looking into.

Made me aware of others thoughts and feelings.

I would be less apt to get upset over a situation that I did not agree with. I would try to better realize the other guy's situation.

Eye opening in seeing as yourself.

I have learned that everybody is different and all of us are individuals. I have become more relaxed participating with the group.

It has made me realize how much of a poor communicator I have been in the past. It has given me a new goal to achieve for myself.

I need to work and help others.

I try not to be so aggressive!

I learned to listen because everyone has an opinion and it may help what you're doing.

That you may have to listen to people and that what you hear is not necessarily what they mean.

If the "communication chain" was devised works, I will feel less tress.

Reduce stress levels.

My attitude has improved and I feel more positive about the direction the plan is headed.

3. **How could we improve the class? What other kinds of content?**

Take guys from this class to get things started. Get feelings out in the open.

Work with it after 4 weeks is over.

The class could be held for six or eight weeks instead of just four. You might get even more out of it. (just a thought?)

Getting everybody involved in what's going on.

Have a couple of classes structured toward actual problem solving. How to ask questions-hitch-hiking on others ideas.

The class could be improved by maybe making it a little longer. The time has always passed fast.

Problem solving.

Keep an open mind on everything that is brought up in class!

Make it more than just 4 weeks.

Maybe find a way to break the ice.

Rich did an excellent job. The class would be hard to improve. We covered the base of the major problems affecting this plant.

4. **Did we as an instructional team clearly communicate what we expected of the students in the course? What could we do to improve that?**

Yes, you took out Q as to what we felt was most important and kept us going on it.

Liked it the way it was.

I thought the class explained well what its purpose was

Let everyone take a turn in saying what's on their mind

Yes - you incorporated visuals and examples I thought was good.

Communication between instruction and class was very good.

Yes, you did a fine job.

Yes

Yes

Very well

Yes

1. No   2. A little history of what is happening from both sides of the story.

Yes. It would be difficult to improve on the way Rich conducted these classes/meetings.

5. **What are some ways that we could use better or more appropriate materials?**

Just keep the guys involved help them to express their feelings, by use of computers or whatever way will help. Everyone is different.

Use supervision & worker together to get problem in the open.

More techniques on learning how well you explain something or pay attention.

Possibly an overhead projector if necessary.

Give the instructor tour of the plant, and explain the function of each area.

Video tapes, examples.

None

6. How much does the company's attitude toward the class factor into your learning?

We'll have to wait and see how it goes but if they stay involved it can differently go along way.

I was very involved with the class because the company was really wanting something good to come out of it.

It's going to take time to get everyone working together.
Uncertain - I don't want this to fizzle out - like other programs have.

A great deal if the company didn't think it would not help they would not have let us take the class.

Very little, we need to learn with or without the company.

7. Other comments/suggestions.

Thank you for giving all of us the opportunity to let out a lot of frustrations that have been built up for a long time.

Keep with company problems and let worker be a part of the company.

Don is a very good instructor and communicator, he makes you feel at ease with him and other people.

Keep it going.

Fine job, accomplished a lot.

COMMENTS

Rich, I want to thank you for helping me and the rest of the class to talk to each other and maybe we can work better together.

I would like to thank both you and Don for helping me get confidence in myself, as far as feeling that I can communicate better with people. This is going to be extremely helpful in the future for me and my family. Thanks a lot.

I wish there were more classes involving management and employees in communicating with each other. Because I feel it could become a very strong barrier in our surroundings in the future.

I think it would be helpful to have the entire shop go through this class. There are a lot of guys in the shop who have some good ideas I know they would like to express.

-

I enjoyed the class and felt that Rich was very competent. The class provided us with a message for improvement. Whether or not we improve is up to everyone here at P.C. Thanks again Rich for your help.

If we keep management involved we will reduce reject rate and stop attitude problems before they start.

Try to keep everyone all the way from one side of the flow chart to the other involved and motivated about the chart we will see positive results.

-

I think this class was a good thing. It helped employees and management to cooperate a lot better and the teacher was easy to talk to and get along with.

The instructor did an excellent job. Thanks.

I would think that the class could be longer as these were some minor areas that needed more time. The class was very concise and I hope everyone puts these to good use.

I think the open idea of picking your own problem to solve or work on is a very good idea and helps to involve all members of the class. Shows you how a group of people should and can work together to accomplish a goal.

I thought the classes were a good idea after I was in one. At first I questioned the purpose of the classes but now I can see the value of them if upper management is really serious about bettering the work place. I thought the Instructor was very good at what he did in the classes and brought out a lot of good ideas from everyone.

-

I think these classes will help a lot of problems out.

Class was good. Needed to be longer.

I liked the class, needed to be longer.

I liked the class, needed to be longer.

I feel that the foreman and quality control should keep the men doing the work more informed with what's happening.

Survey Results - Interpretative Data

1. Rates their perception of the level of productive communication in the workplace prior to first WPP communications class. Overall Average 1.66

2. Rates their perception of the level of productive communication in the workplace after they've participated in a WPP communications class. Overall Average 2.97

   Difference between overall average of #2 and #1: +1.31

#1. Worker perception of communication in the workplace before classes is 1.66 on rating of 1-5. #2. Worker perception of communication in the workplace after classes is 2.97. Gain of +1.31 points in 4 weeks.

3. Asks workers to assess the impact of the WPP classes on the improvement they perceive in the level of productive communication in their workplace. Overall Average: 4.07

#3. Worker perceptions of the impact of WPP classes on improvement in communications in the workplace. 4.07 on a 5 point scale - one rated lower than 3.

4. Assesses their perception of their ability to have a positive impact on communications in the workplace.

Lowest score	How many 3 + below	Avg.
3	4	4.34

More optimism in all groups but more so in 1, 2, & 3. Gave the effect of their projects @ an average of 4.34 of 5. Group 4, which lost their deer season proposal, was less optimistic @ 3.50 [see charts]. Still significantly positive about their remaining two proposals.

5. Assesses their confidence that the changes they put in place will be lasting. If they had a less realistic view of their impact, they could have all put 5. This is a clear assessment of their view of their powers to impact workplace. They feel empowered, but not absolutely empowered. Average: 3.10 Range: 1-5

6. Measures their confidence in what they're taking away from class and their ability to transfer this learning

to solve problems beyond their professional lives.
Average: 3.83

Note that their average scores for #6 are .73 higher than #5, indicating they expect their knowledge will be more applicable outside their workplace than in it: (5) 3.10 (6) 3.83. Possible explananation: Less control at workplace.

7. Measures impact of WPP communications class on job satisfaction. Average: 4.00

If a person does not enjoy what he/she is doing, then there will be little satisfaction in being successful at it. With satisfaction comes motivation to do it well, which should equate to better morale and productivity. High overall satisfaction scores in groups 1, 2, and 3 indicates their desire to do well. [see charts]

8. Assesses their perception of their ability to impact productivity in their workplace. Average: 3.59
Compared to #7: -.41

A comparison of #7 and #8 indicates that workers, especially in groups 1, 2, and 3 [see charts] feel less confident in their ability to impact the workplace, particularly in terms of overall productivity. Their general attitude is that they are short of help now and they can't be more productive until the company hires more workers.

9. Cross-references their response to question 6.
Average: 3.69

Rated #6 higher	Rated #9 higher	Same
10	8	11

Honesty question: the answers here should not be appreciably different from #6 and they aren't .14. We know that the respondents are giving thoughtful and honest answers.

10. Assesses the impact of WPP class on their confidence as lifelong learners. Average 4.0

11. Measures their perception of their individual gains as collaborative problem-solvers. Average: 4.24

If workers are confident they can work together (positive results - 4.24), then there is hope for the Quality circles to carry on as an institution-wide problem-solving mechanism.

12. Measures their perception of group gains as collaborative problem-solvers. Average: 4.5
    Compare to #11: +.26

Even more positive about group gains in collaborative problem-solving. Positive score 4.5, a gain of .26.

13. Measures learner attitudes toward application.
    Average: 4.59

#4	#6	#9	#11
+.25	+.76	+.9	+.35

When compared to 4, 6, 9, and 11, the data indicates that while workers saw the information covered in class as highly valuable (4.59), they weren't as clear on its applications yet. The other questions were rated slightly lower.

14. Measures their perception of their ownership of the classes. Average: 4.41 Compare to #11: +.17

Ownership and Empowerment: A score of 4.41 clearly shows that the workers perceived a high degree of their own voice in the affairs in class. The slight difference in scores between #11 & #14 might indicate that workers were making a distinction between potential participation and actual participation. Or they might be indicating that they felt they had more voice here than they might have in future groups such as the quality circles.

15. Measures learners attitudes toward the instruction.
    Average: 4.83

16. Measures learner attitudes toward the instructor.
    Average: 4.70

The President's Article

In the WPP project, we decided to publish a monthly newsletter for all students, former students, partners and other agencies connected with our program. We felt this was a good method of keeping in contact with those most affected by our work. After about two-thirds of the employees at "Acme" had taken our classes, we were hearing some very positive things from the president about what was happening there. Don suggested that the president draft an article for the newsletter, outlining what he felt the classes had done in his company. This and his follow-up letter give us a good sense of how well he felt the needs of the company were met.

When comparing his reactions to those of the workers, it appears that the needs of the workers and the needs of the company can very well be met by using the learner-driven pedagogy employed in our project. Whether the same tactics will work in another environment is not for us to judge at this point. But, here at least, we were able to put theory into practice and realize some highly positive results in the minds of both production and management.

WORKPLACE VOICES

Have you ever thought you had the proverbial "tiger by the tail" one day just to have it turn around and bite you the next? Maybe I did not truly believe I had the "tiger by the tail," but I did believe I had a pretty good grip on it. One day I noticed my grip was slipping and when I had some serious conversations with Don MacMaster from Alpena Community College, I realized help was needed. He approached me with some ideas for in-house continuing education that could take place at our facility. We agreed on a time frame, but needed to arrive at a consensus on the subject matter.

Surveys were distributed among all the company team members to determine what their needs were. I assumed computer skills and math skills would top the list. They were important, however, we heard other voices during the survey. Voices telling us of the need to re-educate ourselves with respect to basic communication skills that would allow communication between all facets of our organization. Therefore, the decision was made to have Don (and later Dr. Richard Lessard) come to our facility to instruct us on workplace problem solving.

Our company had ***quietly*** arrived at a juncture where we needed a major overhaul. The extreme pressures to compete in a global economy, reduce the cost to our customer while accelerating quality standards and staying ahead of today's strict environmental laws had suddenly meant we were too busy to communicate with each other. We were taking each other for granted. We assumed everybody else in the organization explicitly understood the pressures each of us were under and we became angry and frustrated when team members did not act as we saw fit. "Just in time" inventories meant that our customer's sudden rise in production or dwindling inventory quickly became our problem. Our management turned around and handed that "problem" to the production workers. But, whom did production have to hand it to? Each other? Their families? Management? I believe it was a mix of all three. If the company was viewed from the outside, it appeared to be flourishing. Deliveries were made on time to our customers and the quality of the work was second to none. On the inside a gap in communication was expanding, frustration was high and morale was low.

The classes are a tremendous success with management and production participating and working together. Each has learned that others have a voice that needs to be heard and that their concerns and ideas are important. If we can tap into the concept of cooperative thinking, the possibilities are endless. We extinguish the flame of this type of communication, and we have lost one of our most valuable assets. We can not survive in today's economy as a divided work force. If we continue to fight each other, we have nothing left in ourselves to fight the real "enemy" — our competition.

By evaluating the obvious indicators in any business we should be able to quantify the success of this training. I am very confident that the results will be exciting. All the achievements, which are numerous, made by these classes are born of the input by each class member, Don MacMaster, Dr. Lessard, Alpena Community College and the governmental agencies that provided the funding.

Thank you for helping us!

October 18, 1993

Dr. Richard Lessard
Alpena Community College
666 Johnson Street
Alpena, MI 49707-1495

Dear Rich:

I want to say thank you for all your hard work at our facility. It is hard to believe we put over 35 people through your training sessions. I know it has been a wonderful experience for all of us and I hope it has been beneficial to you as well. It took a special instructor to make these classes work at our facility. From what I have seen, I would say they did a lot more than just work, they were a big success!

I know we are a better work place now than we were 5 months ago. What a great feeling it is to be able to honestly say that. Thank you Rich, you made it possible. I hope this is not the end of our relationship with ACC. I will be talking with Don soon to see if it is possible to continue with any other type of training.

Please feel free to stop by and see us when you are in the area, we would all like to see your smiling face again.

Best Regards,

CONCLUSIONS: WHAT HAVE WE LEARNED HERE?

Perhaps the most important thing we learned at ACME Plating is that tailoring the content to suit the needs of the company and the students is by far the most effective strategy. It was repeatedly emphasized by both workers and management that we cannot go into these classes with our own agenda; we must trust our students to assess their own needs and articulate those to us. Granted, we have a great deal of latitude on just how we meet those objectives, but we must let students set the boundaries if not the agenda.

Another generalization that can be made is that by modeling the processes while creating a relevant product will supply all the motivation necessary to put across the concepts. Students here were proud to make a contribution to the company, but more importantly, they felt that they could continue to do so. They clearly felt they could make a meaningful contribution to a collaborative group in the future. They had experienced the process once and felt they could duplicate it in the future.

Each group was able to produce a means to promote continued communication and cooperation in the future. The projects they worked on all dealt with their concerns for ongoing, positive interaction between employees. What they were telling us is that they wanted to open the channels of communication in the classes, but they also wanted to keep them open after the classes were over. There were no personal, selfish motives in the projects. Their efforts and their attitudes indicate that the men desperately wanted to improve their workplace and were willing to try to make personal contribution to that end.

The exit survey [questions 1, 2, & 3] indicates that they perceived communication was in desperate shape before the classes began, and after they were over, it was still not very good but it was better than it was and improving. Most of the change, they felt, was due to the work done in the classes. As student F said, "The downhill run is over; we have leveled off and started back the other way." It also indicates that they gave some thought to our questions. The numbers indicate that they didn't just write down answers; they put an honest value on what they thought the questions called for.

The survey [question 5] tells us that they are confident that the changes they have put in place will continue, but that they are less confident that this will happen than they should be. They feel that the success of their projects will mostly be determined by management rather than themselves, which is not necessarily the attitude we tried to instill. We wanted them to feel they could take charge of their own destiny.

They also indicated [question 6] that they will be able to transfer the processes to situations beyond the workplace. This is especially good, for if we hope to promote lifelong learning, they will have to transfer the applications beyond the specific situations we worked on. The review sheets may have helped with this.

Question 7 could be interpreted as their perception of how well their preliminary goals were met. Since they indicated that the most dissatisfying part of their jobs was the poor communication in the plant, then improving communication in the plant would make jobs more satisfying. As the scores approach 4.0 we can see that they feel they are making progress toward that goal.

One of the goals of any WPP class is to enhance students' confidence in themselves and their abilities to learn. Questions 10, 11, & 12 show us that our objectives of bolstering self-confidence as well as confidence in others were realistic, and perceived as being met. Whether this represents a permanent change in attitude or not will be determined in our follow-up studies.

The communication that took place between the president and the men as each group presented a proposal was especially healthy. The president's approach improved each time and both sides learned things about the other that needed to be unearthed. At no time was a proposal accepted in its entirety, and only once was a proposal rejected [the day off for deer season]. This made the men feel management was indeed approachable and it made management aware that the men could make unselfish contributions to the company. Both sides took some risks in those meetings and came out of them with a healthier attitude.

The final letter from the president indicates that he was pleased with what we were able to accomplish there. The comments from the students show that they were satisfied with what they were able to accomplish. Thus, we can feel confident that communication and problem-solving skills can be taught using the methods we used.

FOLLOW-UP RESULTS

Three months after we completed our last class at Acme we returned to examine what long-term impact the classes might have had on productivity at this facility. We also wanted to review the status of the various projects the classes had developed. We initially contacted the president and asked for a block of his time to confer with him and get his impressions of the work environment in the wake of our sessions there. We also wanted to look at any changes in production output that might have occurred, since we knew he kept comprehensive records of the leading indicators at the plant. We further requested to interview a group of the men who had participated in the classes. We randomly selected one student from each of the five groups, and an additional student at large. We wanted at least one individual who held some ownership in each of the class projects to give his views on its status, as well as his assessment of the overall work environment in the plant. Our random selection yielded us one foreman, two crew leaders, one assistant crew leader [promoted after the classes were over] and two general production workers. This provided us with a good cross section of the workforce there and allowed us to get views from people in the nickel, zinc, water treatment and heat-treat departments. These encompass the main work areas at the facility.

We began our follow-up interviews with a lengthy conversation with the president, discussing any returns realized from the time the workers had spent in class. He immediately identified quality control as the most significant indicator. "If we have to do a job twice and only get paid for it once, it doesn't take a genius to figure out that we're not going to make a profit," he said. "Everything else here feeds off that. If we can keep the reject rate down, we are in good shape." The number of rejected parts is the chief component in assessing overall company performance, he went on, "because if things are going the way they should, we don't have to do parts over." Acme literally coats thousands of small parts daily, and this coating process is delicate and precise. Each man has to do his job effectively or the coating and hardening processes are flawed; parts subsequently have to be "stripped" and retreated.

He then shared his comparison statistics with us, paralleling the figures of the past four months with those of the same four-month period the previous year. The overall rejection rates for October through January were down 31% in the nickel room and down 20% on the zinc line. When asked about the number of orders [since a lighter work load could translate to a slower pace, which, in turn, might help allow for more time, more care and help account for the fewer rejects] he stated that orders were actually up by 5%, so lines, if anything, had to be even busier than at the same period the year before. He also noted that there is one less worker on the floor, so each individual's workload would be slightly increased. Following is a breakdown of the months studied:

Nickel Line:

October, rejects down	*20%*
November, rejects down	*15%*
December, rejects down	*65%*
January, rejects down	*20%*

Zinc Line:

October, rejects down	*18%*
November, rejects down	*20%*
December, rejects down	*26%*
January, rejects down	*32%*

These comparison figures were derived by correlating the number of "mill square feet" coated over a given period of time. Since parts vary in size and shape, the only accurate way to make comparative studies is to determine how many square feet, at the thickness of one milligram, have been coated in a specific amount of time. This helps control the variables created from different sizes and shapes of parts, and provides a more accurate indicator of production rates as well as efficiency.

The president was particularly pleased with the December quality control rating in the nickel room. "This is the lowest rejection rate we have ever had here," he said. "It is particularly good when you consider how busy we were then, the holidays, the distractions that are around at that time of year. Then, of course, in November there was Thanksgiving and deer season, and that's a big event in this area."

Impressive figures, to be sure, so I asked to what he attributed the improved quality of the work there. He began with "communication, cooperation, and education. People are taking time to explain why, and people are asking why, maybe because they are getting answers. People are explaining that, 'If it isn't done this way, this is what will happen.' No doubt about it, in the last five months, people are talking to each other much more." He also mentioned that supervision is making an effort to be more proactive rather than reactive. "We try to anticipate problems and ward them off before they get us into trouble, rather than trying to react after something has gone wrong. The men on the floor are also becoming much better problem-solvers as well, and we're calling on them to help us with this. Supervision is dealing with fewer problems than we were a year ago; the men are taking care of them on their own."

He also discussed a change in the way they were handling the "8-D forms" they use for trouble-shooting. "We are involving more people at all levels. In the past, the plant manager just wrote down what he saw as the problem or solution. Now we have the men directly working with it, such as crew leaders, foremen, quality control, even myself involved and it gives us a much clearer picture of what happened. We aren't making the same mistakes twice anymore because everyone is informed, involved. We've been able to get beyond the blaming and finger-pointing; we just try to see that good things continue to happen and bad things don't happen more than once."

He offered an example of a "blistering" problem they recently experienced with a highly sensitive precision part they had contracted to coat. "We used to have about a 20% reject rate on these parts; the coating just wouldn't hold or it would blister and we'd have to strip them and do them over. But three guys [Students D, F, and N2] just wouldn't accept that 20% rejection rate and kept looking for a solution until they found one. They discovered the temperature in the warehouse had gotten too low this winter to allow the parts to be treated properly. They suggested bringing them onto the floor the night before so they would have a chance to warm up a bit, and that solved the problem. It cut our rejection rate down to 5% and that helped us all out a lot."

He also talked about a "nicking problem" that came about as a result of a new racking table the men were trying to develop [see quality circle section]. Unfortunately, as parts were being dumped onto the tables, there was too much contact between the parts and they were nicking each other, causing miniscule depressions that make them unusable in the low tolerance assembly process of their customers. "In the old days we would have just scrapped the new tables and gone back to the way we were doing it before. But [Student B & Student Z (our two most paradoxical students in the project)] wouldn't give up on it. They stayed with it until they found a way around it. The nicking problem is gone," and the tables are still there.

Another recent development which had the potential for creating a volatile situation at the plant relates to Student E, who decided to terminate his employment here and move on to a new job. His position as head of the water treatment facility was an enviable one in the eyes of most of the men, and filling that vacancy could have taken a delicate turn. Subsequently, the man's assistant was promoted, then a process began to fill the assistant's position. Eight men sought that job but the foremen, the plant manager, the head of quality control, the personnel director, and the president all reviewed the candidates. "We took a positive posture on this," said the president. "We looked for reasons to promote the man rather than looking for reasons for rejecting him. It worked out much better. Then, we took each man aside and explained why we chose the one we did. We thought that was going to be real hard, but it worked out much better than we expected. They took it well and understood. As a result, there were no strong resentments or divisions over this. None of us looked forword to those sessions, but I was real happy with the way things turned out. We're going to do the same when we deal with the 'ripple effect' created as we promote people to fill in for those who are advanced." This procedure speaks well of the new approaches to communication at Acme. Both management and labor seem willing to discuss even sensitive issues on a more rational basis, and there has been enough trust developed on each side to make the communication process more effective. In short, there are some clear indications of a more proactive approach to problems, a consideration of audience perspective, and a willingness to face even the most difficult communication situations in a direct and open manner.

We then turned to the status of the various projects the men had worked on in their classes. The first to come up was attendance. The president reported that eleven people had received the incentives for the first ninety day period. This represents about 30% of the workforce there, and he noted it was accomplished during the holiday and deer seasons. When asked if he felt this was a good number, he said, "It is for that time of year. There are a lot of distractions in November and December, so maybe the incentives had a positive effect. We'll know more at the end of the next ninety day period. Absenteeism in general has been down for the past three months" [though he provided no specific figures for this one]. On a similar note, although they have had to replace some workers, no one who took classes has been terminated, except for Student E, who indicated during the classes that he was prepared to leave as soon as he was secure in his new sales job.

The quality circles have been meeting monthly, though, according to the president, company management needs to make a stronger commitment to seeing that meetings are held on schedule. So far the circles have developed the following improvements:

Devised new tables, minimizing the fatigue of bending over for parts, and eliminating much of the wasted motion as the men rack the parts entering the treatment tanks.

Designed a "rack stabilizer" which speeds up the racking process and equates to a more consistent number of full racks in the tanks, making the temperatures and chemical components in the tanks easier to control.

Composed a memo regarding a change in the drying process so that those workers further down the line don't "inherit" problems of marred parts as they are unracked. The men then composed a message of thanks for the cooperation they got on that idea.

Replaced two circle members who were late for meetings or missed meetings [indicating that they want only those people who are committed to the circles].

Presently developing safety chains on the nickel line to prevent accidents, making the men less cautious and more efficient.

Working on a speaker system in the storage area to save going back and asking for new parts to be brought up to the lines.

They asked for [and got] the company newsletter reinstated. They are asking for more people to contribute to it.

I see these quality circles as a real key to the changes taking place at this facility. Through them the employees are being given a legitimate voice in what happens in their workplace, in their world, and those voices are being heard. It is the expression, reception and implementation of their ideas that is important to the team management approach. They are realizing some ownership in their work environment and feeling they can contribute, which inspires them to seek new ways to impact their workplace. It should also be noted that the men are coming up with innovations which will help them as well as the company. Any expenses incurred in the implementation of the above ideas are sure to return to the company via efficiency and overall productivity.

The plant manager has been distributing the "Progress Reports" on each employee's anniversary. On three occasions he has used the supervisor forms for assessments of himself, asking employees to rate his performance. The president seemed pleased that these were not just "a whitewash job, but they didn't rip him either." He noted that the forms revealed some of the plant manager's strengths as well as his weaknesses. The progress reports have also become a standard tool in the evaluation of new employees at the end of their first week, at thirty days, and again at ninety days.

Relative to the training program, new workers are spending the first week with crew leaders and foremen. There have been few new hires recently, but they plan to use the mentor system more effectively when they do. The training video was less of a success. "We made one, but I wasn't at all happy with what we were showing. Sound is a problem; there is too much background noise back there. I asked a professional company about coming in but they wanted something like $7000 to do it and I'm debating whether or not it's worth it." On the upside, at least the attempt was made; the men saw their idea acted upon. If it didn't work out, they at least understand why.

The flow chart continues to be used and it is getting the crew leaders more involved, and keeping them better informed. Problems "are getting solved at the proper places instead of having people coming to me or to the plant manager. The crew leaders serve as a communication pipe line back and forth between supervision and production," as the president put it. On the other hand, when we talked to the men, they mentioned that it works best at the middle levels. In particular, the quality control man wants to skip channels and change things on his own. This was a concern when the men first developed the communication flow chart, and it seems to remain a problem.

The president also noted that the overall management team is making progress. The biggest change has been noted in Student A [a supervisor]. "He has made some dramatic, and needed, changes in the empowerment of workers." He has been with the company for thirty years and was trained under the old, top-down management style. It was hard for him to believe in the new employee involvement concepts at first, but he seems to enjoy his new role. Things are much more "above board" now, although the president felt that, "there is still a long way to go. You were right; the real hard part is to keep these things going after the classes are over. It was good that you mentioned that to each of the classes."

We concluded our session with the president and began meeting with the randomly selected employees in groups of three. The first group particularly reinforced the president's view of the changes that have taken place in Student A. Student G, a very forthright spokesman, noted that "A tries to communicate with us much more than he used to. He explains things to us, why things are done or changed, what parts are 'hot' [those requiring immediate attention] and which ones aren't, and he never used to do that. There aren't as many last minute changes. There are no more uproars back there."

They also noted that the plant manager was making good use of the progress reports. Student DD noted that the men "are getting them on their anniversary." They questioned why he gave out three of them on himself, suggesting that he would pick out the best one to put in his file. I reminded them that they would have three others involved in their reports, so maybe he felt the same number would be appropriate for him. Also, if their intent was to provide something positive in the men's files, the same should be true for supervision. Their views on this could reflect some regression back to their myopia, viewing things from a single perspective. I reminded them that I was not trying to say that the manager did what he did for those reasons; I was just providing other ways to look at it and they should too--before they make up their minds.

I asked how many had received attendance incentives. One in the first group [Student X] had. I asked what he thought of it. "It was definitely a step in the right direction. It wasn't a lot but it was better than nothing. I liked it." The other two felt that it would have little effect on them, although if they found that they were close to qualifying at the end of the ninety days, they would make an effort to cash in on one. [The incentives included a dinner for two, gift certificates to various local merchants or a savings bond. The men chose which they would prefer.] Two in the second group [of three] got them and said, "It worked for me."

When asked about the overall atmosphere in the plant, Student H said, "Things are much more relaxed. The overall attitude is more positive." The second group again mentioned how much more team oriented Student A has become. The significant fact here is that these comments are coming during a 5% increase in work load at the plant. If "things are more relaxed" yet they are busier, they clearly feel there has been an improvement in the overall work environment.

Relative to that, I asked if they could notice any difference between those workers who had taken the classes and those who hadn't. "Oh yea," said Student DD. I pressed for some specific differences. "You can talk to the ones who had the classes a lot better. They seem to listen better and tell you what's on their mind." Student G added, "The new ones just don't seem to care as much. The rest of us try to communicate with each other." We were unable to get any more specific information than that from them.

The men all spoke of the quality circles with a great deal of pride. Each group recited the accomplishments of the circles and the "progressive ideas" that have come out of them; they are all keenly aware of the changes that have come about because of **their** quality circles, whether they are actual members of one or not. They also praised maintenance for quick responses in getting their ideas up and running. They did mention one flaw which has developed; the forms the class devised for the "idea man" to use in presenting his idea to the circle aren't being utilized in all cases, thus it is highly possible that the "idea man" isn't getting the necessary credit/incentives for his idea. This could prove to be a serious obstacle to the future of the quality circles. If they are going to work to their full potential, the quality circles need a steady flow of new ideas. The way to encourage ideas, and get them from everyone, is to see that people get incentives. On the other hand, it could mean that the men are more interested in affecting their workplace than in receiving rewards. I suggested that the men involved in the circles [or a particular project] work toward getting the men to use the forms and then getting management to reward good ideas with incentives.

Both groups mentioned that they were pleased with the results of the communication flow chart, although they consistently acknowledged problems at the supervision end of it. They felt crew leaders were taking initiative and seeing that the men on the lines are informed on important matters. This reinforces the comments on the empowerment issue that the president had made. It appears that when these crew leaders were empowered, they assumed responsibility for their areas; they have delivered and both management and labor are encouraged by the results attained so far.

In general, the comments by the men replicated what the president had said. Since we were the ones who had selected the men to be interviewed, and since the president had not talked to them before we got there, we can be assured that they were not prompted to answer our questions the way they did [not that these men were likely to do that anyway]. They were painfully honest throughout the project and we have no reason to believe that pattern was broken here.

Don and I agreed that the overall disposition and mood of the men we interviewed were clearly more positive than they were at the start of the project, as reflected in both their answers and in their body language. They also demonstrated some empathy for what the president was trying to do. Student H: "You know, he has people he has to answer to too. It isn't easy for him to sell some of our ideas." Then I told them that they were helping him do that. They were coming up with some very creative, unselfish ideas, and they were producing some very good results; they were making things better for everyone. It isn't hard to sell good ideas, especially when they work.

After we talked to the men, the president anxiously approached us. "Well, was I on or not?" he asked. I assured him that his assessment of current conditions at the plant were almost identical to those of the men, to which he gave a great, genuine sigh of relief. It was clear that he had taken some serious risks in having us come in and work with the men in the areas of communication and empowerment. Empowerment was not something that managers before him had endorsed, and he was relieved to feel that he could report some more positive results to the owners. He left us with a request to run all of the remaining employees through our classes in the near future.

FOLLOW-UP REACTIONS

Whether these methods would work in other workplaces is not for us to say. Clearly this facility was ripe for change. There were some serious communication problems; friction and division were the norms; people snarled *at* and frequently talked *about* co-workers, but seldom *to* co-workers. Management didn't like what was going on and labor liked it even less. The people there were hungry for a new menu. They weren't sure what changes should be made, nor did they have any ideas about how to begin, but most were angry and unhappy with the work environment, and few looked forward to another day of work.

In the first sessions of each class, the men frequently vented their anger and hostility. It was distressing at first, even frightening at times; but upon reflection, it was an essential ingredient in their growth process. Once they cleared the air, they settled down to attacking problems rather than people. They assumed some ownership of the classes, and later, complete ownership of their projects. It is clear that these patterns have continued.

It is important to focus on the honesty with which these men approached our classes. Had they been less open with us and each other, we could have floundered throughout the entire project, trying to find out just what they thought should be changed. But they came in, stated what was on their minds, ranted about problems, even shouted at one another on occasion. Then, they got to the issues that needed to be addressed. Throughout the instructors' journals it is noted how "painfully honest" the men were, and that may have served as a key ingredient in the transformation that took place. Another was the courage they showed in assuming responsibility for making their workplace better, knowing that they could possibly fail. At first they wanted to say that things were out of their hands, that it was all up to management, but they didn't stay stuck in that posture very long. Granted, we pushed, pulled and generally thrust responsibility on them, but there is no one-to-one relationship between what is taught and what is learned. They were the ones who made the connections, who put these concepts into practice; now they are the ones making the effort to keep things moving in a positive direction.

But perhaps the most important component of this success story is the willingness on the part of the president to take the chance of empowering men who had been viewed in an adversarial role in the past. He had the nerve to break some new ground here and try to sell both management and labor on an idea he couldn't even be confident would work. He put class lists together in a deliberative manner, forcing people who had butted heads in the past to sit down and face each other. Then he had the mettle to validate the suggestions of the various classes by putting them in place and giving them an opportunity to work--or fail. Once the men saw that they were being heard and that their ideas were not only valued but actually implemented, things began to turn around. As they saw their projects come to fruition, their belief in their abilities to contribute, and their emotional investment in the classes [and the company] grew. In contrast, early in the project students frequently lamented the lack of follow-up on good ideas of the past, but this time the president, and the men themselves, didn't allow this to happen. I see the commitment of the president and his follow-up on the ideas the men generated as the most significant factor in the improvement of this workplace.

Given the same ingredients, we are confident that similar methods could again align learner-driven and organization-driven agendas in the workplace. But given less open and honest students, and/or management with less courage and commitment, one should be cautious about predicting comparable results.

WORKS CITED

Anderson, S. 1992. "Creating an Effective Strategy for Learner Feedback." Adult Basic Education, Vol. 2 #3, pp. 161-166.

Brookfield, S. 1993. "Self-Directed Learning, Political Clarity and the Critical Practice of Education." Adult Education Quarterly, Vol. 43 #4, pp. 227-240.

Bruner, Jerome. Acts of Meaning. Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1990.

Deci, E. & Ryan, R. Intrinsic Motivation and Self-Determination in Human Behavior. New York: Plenum, 1985.

Deci, E. & Ryan, R. 1987. "The Support of Autonomy and the Control of Behavior." Journal of Personality and Social Psychology. Vol. 33 #6, pp. 1024-1037.

Freire, Paulo. The Politics of Education. Massachusetts: Bergan and Garvey, Inc., 1987.

Gage, John. "Why Write?" *In* Petroskey, Anthony & Bartholomae, David. The Teaching of Writing. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1986, pp. 8-29.

Mikulecky, L. (1986, April). "The Transferability of Literacy Training to Job Training." A paper presented @ International Reading Association, Philadelphia, PA. p. 8.

Robinson, Jay. Conversations on the Written Word: Essays on Language and Literacy. New Hampshire: Hinemann Educational Books, 1990.

Shor, Ira, and Freire, Paulo. A Pedagogy for Liberation: Dialogues on Transforming Education. Massachusetts: Bergan and Garvey, 1987.

Sticht, T. Basic Skills in Defense. Alexandria VA: Human Resources Research Organization, 1982.

Sticht, T. & Mikulecky, L. 1984. "Job-Related Basic Skills: Cases and Conclusions." ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 246 312. p. 33.